

MY TRIVIAL LIFE
AND
MISFORTUNE

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MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND
MISFORTUNE



MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND
MISFORTUNE

BY
A PLAIN WOMAN

A GOSSIP WITH NO PLOT IN PARTICULAR

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

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MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND MISFORTUNE.

Book I

CHAPTER I.

My father died when I was only five years old. My dear mother never ceased to grieve for him with a regretful love. She hoped when I grew up I would be as good, and agreeable, and lively, and clever as he. My father had only one peculiarity which I do not think my mother wished me to inherit, as it seemed to have proved a trying one to her. My mother had a remarkable gift of prophecy, and her prophecies always came true. Now when any great social or political or religious event foretold by her happened, what used my father to do but forget her prophecy and his own flat contradiction as to the possibility and probability of the accomplished fact! My mother has told me he would even go so far as to declare he had

never questioned the likelihood of the predicted event. Certainly in this respect my father was a most provoking husband.

My mother constantly entertained me with an account of her many fulfilled prophecies. She and her sister prophesied on all occasions; but while Aunt Jane gave forth high Tory, illiberal predictions, my mother's spirit foretold the triumph of liberty, equality, civilisation, and peace.

From the time of my father's death till the day my aunt married Uncle Sherbrook, Aunt Jane, the Proverbs of Solomon, and Dr MacShaw's Commentary lived in our house with my mother and me. I particularly disliked that Commentary. I seem to have hated it from infancy. I once fell into a sad scrape about it. I made a doll's pillow of a hymn-book and a bolster of the Commentary. Aunt Jane reproved me for this disrespectful act with much severity. She ordered me to put the book away; so I threw the old Commentary—it was a very long-winded one—under the sofa. Aunt Jane desired me, under penalty of punishment, to give her Dr MacShaw's Exposition of Holy Scripture. My spirit rose; I hated obeying Aunt Jane—I refused. We had a battle, and it ended in my going to bed in dire disgrace; but the book remained under the sofa. I never again played with the blessed work, except one Sunday when, having broken my Noah's Ark, I propped it up with the Commentary. It was the only large book I could find in my hurry. While thus occupied, I happened to

raise my eyes, and behold! there was Aunt Jane watching me. I jumped up and steeled my heart for a fight. But she did not scold me; she only looked and walked away. I then remembered Noah's Ark is a Sunday toy. I might have propped it up with a prayer-book had I wished.

My mother has often told me she was delighted when Aunt Jane married Uncle Sherbrook, for she had thought her sister would never find a man *sound* enough to marry, but would live on with us, and lead me kicking and crying in the way I should go—that way from which I might not afterwards depart. Aunt Jane was always quoting Solomon. Oh, how I detested Solomon in those days! I discovered the King of Judah and Israel had a great many wives, and I know my aunt thought it wrong to marry more than one person at a time. Aunt Jane had been quoting, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him." So I said, "Aunt Jane, if you marry, how many husbands will you have?" "One, child!—one!" she cried, tartly. "Sophy, you had better learn your hymn; you did not know it yesterday." "Oh, but, Aunt Jane, I want to ask you, if you were a man—a very grand man, and a very good man, a king with a gold crown—you would have a great many wives, would not you?" "If I had a great many wives, Sophy, I should be a very naughty man, and not a good man at all, and I should not go to heaven." "Then," said I, "Solomon was a very naughty man; and, Aunt Jane, you ought not to

do what a naughty man tells you, or you won't go to heaven." Aunt Jane was not great in argument; she invariably answered by reproving her adversary. "Learn your hymn this instant, child; do you hear? I hope you are not going to be disobedient. Do not oblige me to punish you; for, Sophy, you know how it pains me to do so." Strange to say, Aunt Jane always imagined it hurt her feelings more to punish me than it hurt mine to be punished. I learnt the hymn as a tribute of respect to a fallen enemy. I can perfectly recollect feeling I had gained a victory over Aunt Jane.

We had ten days' respite from the Proverbs of Solomon. I think Aunt Jane finds a difficulty in learning by heart, for she learns nothing new. She is like a barrel-organ: it must have been awkward to get the tunes inside her; but once there, the same tune plays on for ever. The wisdom of Solomon will stay in her till doomsday. The Proverbs were always enunciated with a seriousness admirably suited to Aunt Jane's long and infallible upper lip.

My aunt was generally spoken of as an estimable, sensible person. She imagined herself to despise the vanities of dress: all the same, when she bought a new gown, she told Madame Julie Browne to make it in the fashion. But a new style of hairdressing she looked upon as a thing savouring of mundane frivolity, and even slightly of French Popery. There was a certain awful air of Protestant propriety in the cork-screw ringlets at each side of her head, and in the little

twist of hair behind without puff or padding. Being no longer young, Aunt Jane so far complied with the fashion of the day as to perch a tuft of black lace with falling lappets on the little top-knot. However, her portly figure, her strongly-marked Roman nose, and infallible upper lip, counterbalanced the *unsound* look of these lappets. *Soundness* was and is an absorbing mania with this excellent woman. She was over forty before she met a man as fully convinced as herself of the eternal damnation of all Papists, Jews, Turks, Greeks, and infidels. To use her own words, she married "a truly Christian gentleman." Uncle Sherbrook was more *sound* than fascinating. In appearance he was a tall, clean-shaven, sallow-faced man, with a long narrow head, a high and very narrow forehead, and a long thin nose.

Aunt Jane was stout and my uncle thin, and yet I think they grew somewhat like each other, especially in severe infallibility of expression. You could not help envying this pair their strong convictions—they had no misgivings. I admired Uncle Sherbrook . . . at a distance. I was afraid of him when I came too near. He was a man of honour—a gentleman. He had some prejudices; he was a Tory of the old school. He was a proud, a very proud man, and came of an old family. He had a taste for armorial bearings, and secretly thought an immensity of his own green bear. This peculiar-looking animal danced upon one toe on all the plates, dishes, knives, forks, spoons, and tea-cups at Sherbrook Hall. He was also to be seen

capering upon the dining-room chairs. Aunt Jane used to wonder if anybody had ever seen a real green bear. If such an animal had existed before the Flood, she thought it probable there would be some tradition to that effect scattered over the earth by the lost tribes of Israel. But, for my part, I never imagined the green bear to be a Jew. I thought it far more likely he was a bilious English beast. Knowing my uncle to be of an old family, and of an ancient, crusty temper, I fancied the bear might be his first British ancestor: the Druids may have preserved him in a vegetable acid, until, being rather sour by nature, he turned green. Uncle Sherbrook had also Scotch blood in his veins, for his mother was a Miss Stewart. I once asked my uncle if his mother belonged to the same family as Mary Queen of Scots. "The Stewarts," he replied, "were Lord High Stewards of Scotland from time immemorial. I believe the Stuarts are a younger branch."

Nothing enraged my dear mother more than Uncle Sherbrook's pretension to treat the Royal Stuarts as poor relations. "I hate the Scotch!" she would cry; "they think all the old families wore ragged petticoats!" When put out, my mother would not call the Scotchman's garb a kilt.

My mother had her own family pride, and it did not lie at the radical-equality-of-all-men side of her heart. My mother and Aunt Jane traced their descent from a certain Sire Denis, a Norman said to have held a high command in the rear-guard at

Hastings, and surnamed from this circumstance *Denis de l'arrière garde*. One of Sire Denis's descendants, Geoffrey or Geoffroi de Rigarde, was our immediate progenitor. In the reign of Queen Anne, a Rigardy married a Wrenstone, an heiress.

Sophia Rigardy-Wrenstone did not disgrace her ancient lineage when she married a Thursley—or Thorslea, as the name should really be written. The Thorsleas are in the Doomsday-Book: they were important Saxons before the Conquest, but not perhaps so important since. Mamma has often wished she could remember the meaning of *Thors* and *Lea* in Anglo-Saxon, for they do mean something. Papa told her what, and she forgets.

However much my uncle might hold forth in the domestic circle, he did not parade to the world the antiquity of the Stewarts and Sherbrooks. He and Aunt Jane were calmly convinced of their own importance, and were perfectly satisfied with the exalted position they imagined themselves to hold in society. Uncle Sherbrook left boasting to what he called "certain cotton-spinners who take the title of Esquire." He considered himself a real esquire, and would as willingly have excluded mock esquires from society as he would the unsound from heaven. I used to think, if Uncle Sherbrook were really infallible (at times I thought he was), mock esquires and unsound heretics would be seen some fine day walking off to the infernal regions arm in arm.

The green bear himself could not have been of a

more singular sort of constitution than Uncle Sherbrook; for my uncle had a striking peculiarity—he was never cross, though often bilious. When staying with us, I used constantly to think him decidedly out of temper; but Aunt Jane always said it was London disagreed with “dear Edward’s liver.” My aunt considers the liver to be a sort of internal Jesuit—the unseen author of all evil. She tells me her husband’s constitution was nearly ruined when she married him, but that “under Providence” she became the means of restoring his health by a course of the water cure. During the honeymoon, Aunt Jane discovered Uncle Sherbrook had been poisoned by the old system—the doctors had mistaken his case; so the bride declared the bridegroom’s liver to be out of order, and from that day my uncle had a liver complaint.

My aunt is as infallible a doctor as a divine. She may truly be said to have two religions—sound Protestantism and the water cure; the one for the heart, the other for the liver. There was yet a third faith which had to be held by whomsoever would be saved at Sherbrook Hall, and the faith was this—that he believe in the piety and morality of an eight-o’clock breakfast. My mother and I never embraced this faith, but it was a piece of sound doctrine enforced upon us even in our own house by the Sherbrooks. Mamma and I lived together after an easy-going fashion which scandalised my uncle and aunt. Their arrival in Montagu Square was like Luther’s in Rome—they

saw there a she-dragon sadly wanting reformation. Poor little dragon that I am! Words in season—ay, and out of season—never ceased trying my patience. The Sherbrooks reproved me, and they reproved mamma about me. They were shocked at my education. My mother liked to have me always with her as my companion, and in truth my youth was not fretted by much study. Yet it was the little I knew, and not my ignorance, which grieved my uncle and aunt, for had I not learnt that little from that dear old heretic Monsieur Tolain? Uncle Sherbrook had learnt French from an Englishman and a Protestant, but it so happened that mamma did not admire her brother-in-law's accent. As to Aunt Jane, she was a person into whom neither a French accent nor an evil spirit could possibly enter. She knew a pious, well-informed Christian lady, of a certain age, eminently suited to undertake a difficult education like dear Sophy's—an education requiring much firmness and sound Church of England principles.

Mamma and I loved our little *tête-à-têtes*, and we hated the idea of a third person, pious, well-informed, and of a certain age. A resident governess's constant nagging would have killed me—as if Aunt Jane were not enough for any one's temper! It is true the governess might perhaps have killed a more accomplished young lady than the now living Sophy, for I am not accomplished. I cannot do fancy-work: I hate it! I cannot sing. As to music, I have no talent for it; or rather, yes I have: I have talent enough to know

that I have none! I began the German grammar twice, and stuck at the definite article. Of Italian, I know enough to guess the meaning of an opera: "Amor, cuor, occhi d' angiol, divina stel che sta nel ciel, perfida diva," are familiar to me; and when I hear the cry, "Il vecchio genitor!" I expect to see a cruel-hearted parent with a bass voice. The little I do know, I picked up from my French master, Monsieur Tolain, for I declare he had quite a genius for teaching agreeably. Though he scolded me, he never bored *me* so I liked him. He was really a man of talent. For my part, I shall ever remember him with affection and gratitude, and I said so to Aunt Jane one day when we were talking over old times. Much shocked, she remarked that Jesuits were insinuating, and she told me a story taken from the 'Record,' of a Jesuit who entered an English family as the young ladies' Protestant governess. The girls never suspected their instructress was not a lady of the soundest Church of England principles, though they remarked she always sat with her back to the light, doubtless on account of her moustache and whiskers. I hoped that pious person of the Church of England principles about whom Aunt Jane used to bother my dear mother, might grow a moustache and turn out a Jesuit in disguise. But I did not say so; I only said, "My dear aunt, Monsieur Tolain is himself; believe me, he is nobody else in disguise."

"You know my opinion on this subject, Sophy, and your poor dear mother knew my opinion, but she

would never take your uncle's or my advice. Had she done so, I will say you might have been very different from what you are. But, Sophy, I shall not argue any more. You may argue if you please."

My aunt evidently imagined she was arguing, for she got quite red, shook her curls, and became personal in her remarks. "Sophy, I do not find you have so much spare affection and gratitude that you need waste them about the world on people who are not relations, and for whom you certainly would not go into mourning if they died, and with whom while alive you were always quarrelling."

"I often like the people with whom I quarrel, Aunt Jane. Monsieur Tolain is one of my silvered pills."

"Silvered pills! What on earth do you mean by silvered pills, Sophia?"

"I will tell you, Aunt Jane," said I. "Now that I am no longer young, I begin to reflect, and I have made a little corner in my heart where I keep certain old friends, like silvered pills in a little round pill-box. These are friends of my childhood and youth. I may have quarrelled with them as I used in old times."

Here Aunt Jane sighed deeply.

"They may have scolded me, and at first I may have disliked the pill, and may even have found it hard to swallow. But when once taken, I keep the silvered pill safe in this corner of my heart, and no one can take it from me."

"Sophy," asked my aunt, "am I a silvered pill?"

"To tell you the truth, Aunt Jane," I replied, "I never quite know if I have swallowed you or not."

"Perhaps, Sophia," said my aunt, severely—"perhaps, Sophia, you would call me a black dose."

"Well, perhaps I should, Aunt Jane," answered I, for the fun of it, "if you were not on the water cure."

"Sophia," said my aunt, "your similes are not refined." And she sighed and shook her head, and seemed to imagine I was still arguing.

Certainly Aunt Jane's only sister's only child was a thorn in the flesh to her,—a stumbling-block to her soul; for she undoubtedly felt (I can't tell why) that her responsibility on my account was great both towards God and man, and she somehow managed to think Uncle Sherbrook would also have to answer for me not only in this life, but in the next. Under these circumstances of terrible responsibility, it was perhaps natural that my aunt should object to everything I did or learnt if she and Uncle Sherbrook had not previously been taken into solemn consultation on the subject. It was natural perhaps, but decidedly a nuisance, as Aunt Jane would object to all sorts of little things it never entered our head to consult her about. Thus she made a great fuss once about a very small matter. I had merely taken a few painting lessons without her previous sanction and advice. So she objected to my learning drawing, and appa-

rently for no reason except that "your uncle and I were not consulted on this subject, for your mother never takes our advice." She prophesied that painting would disagree with my liver. It did nothing of the kind; so she discovered that two of the nodules in my spine just beneath my shoulders were crooked. In all her letters she inquired for poor dear Sophy's crooked back, or else she hoped (*D.V.*) poor dear Sophy's spine was no worse; and when my mother in answer told her she had consulted a surgeon, and felt sure dear Jane would be delighted to hear that Sophy's spine was perfectly straight, my aunt wrote back—

"I am truly thankful and I heartily rejoice that under Providence the surgeon does not take a desponding view of poor dear Sophy's case—(*D.G.*) Nevertheless my dear Sophia, I think it my duty to impress upon you my firm conviction that there are two nodules in Sophy's spine which have been injured by an injudicious (and perfectly unnecessary) application on her part to her pencil and still worse to her brush for I well know what sad effects oil-painting has not only on the liver, but also on the back and if you will not take Edward's and my advice on this subject and insist upon our dear Sophy's giving up drawing and painting perhaps you will profit by my experience and use as a matter of precaution if not of cure, a cold-water compress which may be fastened over the

affected nodules across the back so as to intersect the spine latitudinally at right angles and which may be worn during the day and also at night for I entertain sanguine hopes that the cold compress (*if persevered in*) will (*D.V.*) have the effect of permanently strengthening poor dear Sophy's weakened spine. Can you give Edward and me a bed on the 29th? for Mr Jones is in London at present and Edward is going up to town on that day to consult him about that right-of-way which you no doubt remember has been a subject of litigation between Edward and the village for the last ten years, and I hope to accompany him (*D.V.*), and with my own hands I hope to fasten the cold compress across poor dear Sophy's back."

Aunt Jane did come, and she did fasten the wet bandage latitudinally at right angles across my affected nodules. When she was leaving us next day, she told us with a deep sigh that she would write and announce her safe arrival at Sherbrook Hall, "if indeed, Sophia, it pleases the Lord that I should arrive there safely." Aunt Jane always spoke of her safe arrival anywhere as doubtful, and she seemed to take a kind of spiritual, tenderly sorrowful pleasure in thus sighing out her possible destruction: not that she was at all a courageous woman, or one you would like to be with in any sort of danger or accident. It was some days before we heard from her, but this was her letter when it did come:—

“MY DEAR SOPHIA,—You would have heard from me sooner had I not been completely invalided and for one morning indeed, confined to my room by a sharp attack of catarrh and rheumatism for I fear that this mortal coil is wearing away and I pray that He will think fit to take me from this world of sin in His own good time. I applied the cold compress to my throat and also to my right knee (which was somewhat affected) and I am thankful to say (*D.G.*) that I received much benefit from these applications. I begged Edward to write and tell you of my illness but he said he could not find time to do so and indeed he himself was not very well having caught a slight chill on the liver but I am thankful to say he is now much better (*D.G.*), and he hopes to be in town (*D.V.*) on the 4th instant for the day and he will then call in Montagu Square at luncheon-time when he will leave with you a parcel directed to Madame Julie Browne. It is a new black silk with yellow stripes which I should like Madame Julie to have ready-made for me on my arrival in town. The stripes are perpendicular and I want to know should you advise me to have the flounces placed at regular intervals up the front of the skirt? If you do thus advise me, I think each flounce should be cut so as to have one yellow stripe running horizontally across the petticoat because I shall require the dress for rather smart occasions and I think this arrangement will look newer and more fashionable than a costume composed of merely straight stripes. I

hope poor dear Sophy's spine is better. And now, with my best love to her and my blessing for you both, believe me, dear Sophia, to be your fondly attached sister,

"JANE SELINA HARRIET BARBARA SHERBROOK."

The day after this letter arrived, just ten minutes before post-time, mamma exclaimed, "What will become of us? I have never written to Jane. My darling child, I implore you, scatter off a line any way. Say I have a headache, inquire for the rheumatism, and tell your aunt I think her too stout for the flounces and horizontal stripes. She will make an irregular zebra of herself with her stripes going in all directions."

I snatched up my pen and scribbled:—

"How is my poor Aunt Jane's rheumatic and mortal coil? I don't think it is wearing away just yet but the weather is damp and mortal coils are apt to get a chill. Mamma's coil has a headache, mine a spine, and Uncle Sherbrook's a liver; still we all intend to live a little longer. I do hope, my dear Aunt Jane, that your knee will walk for many years through this vale of tears. Recollect you must wear out the yellow stripes in this wicked world, at least the perpendicular ones. You may keep the horizontal for a future state. Mamma says your stripes must all go in one direction or you will be an irregular zebra. She objects to your flouncing up the front of your

mortal coil ; she thinks the coil too stout. The post is off, so I have no time to give you my blessing.—
Ever
SOPHY."

Within twenty-four hours I received a lengthy despatch from Aunt Jane saying she and my uncle were deeply shocked and grieved by my strange and blasphemous letter, and that as she was my mother's only sister, she thought it her duty to reprove me severely for the light manner in which I made use of Scriptural language. She moreover said that the decay of this mortal coil was an awful truth, and that if I did not amend my thoughts and ways and words, I should repent of my sins when it was too late. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." She and my uncle therefore earnestly hoped I would go down on my knees in my own closet and ask forgiveness for my sins. With prayers for my sincere repentance and for my eternal salvation, in which my uncle joined, Aunt Jane ended by begging me to believe her my fondly attached aunt,

JANE SELINA HARRIET BARBARA SHERBROOK.

The "Jane Selina Harriet Barbara" looked as if my aunt were signing a catechism, not a sermon. What is your name? Jane Selina Harriet Barbara. How Aunt Jane must have delighted in her youth in getting the full amount of baptismal regeneration due to all those names! During the days of torment when I had to repeat the Church Catechism to Aunt

Jane, she insisted I should call myself Sophia Joanna Selina. Being generally mere Sophy, I felt convinced my godfathers and godmothers in my baptism had baptised somebody else.

Beneath the "Jane Selina Harriet Barbara Sherbrook" was a postscript to this effect : " Your uncle and I are completely at a loss to understand what you can mean by the expression '*she objects to your flouncing up the front of your mortal coil ; she thinks the coil too stout.*' However, you need not explain your meaning, for I regret to say your uncle and I are convinced the interpretation would be as unladylike, unchristian, and blasphemous as the language undoubtedly is." This little amen was signed "J. S. H. B. S."

I am changed since the days I loved skirmishing with Aunt Jane. I am much more careful now how I write than I was then ; for with age I have gained sense, and I have discovered that to find one's flippant ideas ready-made on the tip of a quill, if a delightful, is a dangerous habit. When there is not a curb, my pen runs away with me. I scribble a letter, I post it, and then I think, " Good heavens ! what have I said ? " or rather, " What have not I said ? " Nowadays I no longer write as I think, but I think how I shall write. • It is the safer plan. Yet on one point my spirit still rebels against the canons of orthodox soundness. I cannot *D.G.* and *D.V.*, and I will not ! I hate this cant ! *D.V.*-ing is an easy way of appearing religious. It is convenient, and but little trouble to concentrate one's piety in a *D.* and a *V.* But if our feelings should

move us to pray, why not pray naturally and in our own language? Why not say "please God" or "thank God"? If the desire be in our heart, it is worthy of rational expression; and if it be not, surely the Almighty is not flattered by an empty compliment. Hearing Aunt Jane animadvert one day on the scapulæ worn by monks and nuns, I said to her, "Aunt Jane, you do not wear relics, but have not you yourself a little charm against the Evil One?"

"Sophy, are you mad?"

"The charm is not hung round your neck, Aunt Jane; it lies in your inkstand. What else but charms are your *D.V.*'s and your *D.G.*'s? They cannot be prayers, my dear; for surely you are not a Papist, so you would not pray in Latin."

Aunt Jane, with a dignity quite sublime, declined to argue.

As the year wore on and the weather became cold, I found the latitudinal cold compress extremely chilly.

"Could we not invent some warmer way of straightening my nodules?" cried I. "Shall I take dancing lessons, mamma? I prefer *chassées croisées* to wet bandages." So we sent for Monsieur Louis Pépinet, the ex-ballet master, who at that time taught Portman Square, Bryanston Square, Montagu Square, and the neighbourhood, to hold up their head and keep their *ecinture en arrière*. If my poor dear Monsieur Tolain was a stumbling-block to the Sherbrooks, what then was Monsieur Pépinet? A ballet-dancer! Beelzebub! Aunt Jane sent me a

tract entitled, "Captain Apollyon ; or, Dancing Downwards," hoping it would warn me of my imminent danger ; but I never read it. I really could not bring myself to read it, for I had had such a sickening of tracts in my short life that I positively hated the very sight of them.

One Christmas, many years ago, Aunt Jane gave me a dozen tracts. They were illustrated by coarse woodcuts representing half-naked negroes whipped by white men in striped trousers and broad-brimmed hats ; Hindoos bowing down to idols who had innumerable arms and hands, while lions and tigers prowled in the distance : or else they depicted scenes nearer home,—good little Tommy dying of consumption ; the pious British workman reading out of a huge book on which the words HOLY BIBLE were inscribed in capital letters—a frowning man in a frock-coat entering by the kitchen-door. When I now see a woodcut of the sort, I perceive at a glance that the rich ungodly man in the frock-coat will be converted by the mere sight of the Christian British workman. I know he will take a sermon in exchange for his rent. But in old times my experience of tracts was not what it is now, and I promised myself delightful stories connected with the pictures. The whipped negroes particularly interested my childish imagination. I cannot describe my anger when I found the blacks whipped to death in a page, and then a dozen pages of pious reflections, ending with a prayer and a hymn, which the " little Christian reader was affectionately entreated to

commit to memory." I read with pleasure how little black Sambo stole the jam before he knew the Church Catechism (he never did so afterwards); I was interested in obstinate Jackey, who refused to honour his parents by learning a hymn on his birthday. I admired spirited Jackey, and took great delight in reading about a certain Miss Fanny who coveted her neighbour's doll. I liked Sambo, Jackey, and Fanny when naughty, but I hated them when good; so when I came to the improving part of these moral tales, I would say to myself, "Sophy, skip the sermon." Goody books bore me to death! I never shall forget my enchantment at the first novel I read. It was the cause of my making a great discovery. I was actually sixteen years of age when for the first time in my life I read a real novel. I borrowed it from my mother's maid, for Aunt Jane would not allow a novel to enter our house through the front door. By a real novel I mean a love-story in which there is no instructive padding. The book was written by "Howard de Vere." I naturally imagined the author to be a man, but I have since heard "Howard de Vere" is a Miss Sarah Anne Jones. Every one in the novel was of surpassing beauty, even the wicked baronet, though he was a horrid man, and had a shocking and most peculiar trick of muttering blasphemous oaths through his clenched teeth. It was only a hard-hearted duke and a cruel marquis who were ugly. Everbody fell in love at first sight with everybody else. The hero and heroine were soon engaged. They adored each other,

but a series of the most unfortunate and incomprehensible misunderstandings arose between them. The Lady Ina imagined Viscount Martletower had spoken to and therefore loved a person he had never even seen, and the Viscount fancied the Lady Ina did not care for him; and so they went on till, the Viscount's brain fever clearing away all complications of jealousy in the middle of the second volume, they unfortunately married.

To marry in the second volume of a novel, I found, was to linger consumptively through the third. The Lady Ina's health was undermined by this foolish wedding—her beauty grew more and more dazzling, and her lungs more and more delicate, through many long, melancholy chapters. I was blind from crying, and was actually glad when the Lady Ina broke her final blood-vessel. There was a great deal of mortality in the book. A young earl, who had also married in the second volume, became quite lovely and then died! The weddings of three secondary couples could not raise my spirits. On the contrary, these discordant festivities jarred with my feelings. In the last chapter of her book, Howard de Vere pressed into the married state every human being she could lay hands on—even a widower and an old maid. Fortunately for my harrowed feelings, there was not a fourth volume to the novel, so the three brides and the three bridegrooms were left to recover in peace from the exhaustion attendant on the complications of courtship.

Notwithstanding the protracted agonies of one volume of mortal illness, this dear, delightful novel enchanted me. I had never before mixed in such dazzling society, or lived in such an atmosphere of burning love. I felt like a recruit under fire, and saw proposals, like bullets, flying around me. I moved in a new world. The illusion was complete.

So thoroughly had I identified myself with the lovely creatures in the novel, that I felt as a triumphant beauty might feel. Even the way the Lady Ina used to dress her hair, as described by Howard de Vere, sounded both romantic and becoming: she wore this lustrous, shimmering crown of gold simply braided across her brow. I imagined braiding to mean plaiting; so I plaited all my hair into a pig-tail like a Chinaman's, and wound the plait round my head, bringing it down very near my forehead. I looked at myself in the glass; but somehow the hair simply braided across the brow did not suit me, so I unplaited it, still gazing at my own reflection—gazing, yet no longer seeing, for Howard de Vere's influence overshadowed me. With my elbows on the dressing-table, and my head leaning on my hands, I fell into a reverie, and sentiments worthy of a beautiful marchioness filled my mind. My imagination took flight and soared amongst the broken hearts of the highest aristocracy. I soon found myself receiving a proposal from a marquis. I refused to marry him on account of his shocking wickedness. I pictured to myself the beneficial effect

this cruel disappointment might be supposed to have on the marquis's moral conduct. I, a nobody in particular, to refuse a marquis with £100,000 a-year! Surely such disinterested virtue would convert the noble sinner from the turf. The marquis wrote me a letter so touching that it brought tears to my eyes. But I remained firm. I could not help thinking, perhaps, I might have consented to become a marchioness had I not felt a secret inclination towards an artistic, poetic young earl, like the earl who died in the second volume of the novel. My thoughts sped on: the earl in thrilling words asked me to . . . But alas for these splendid visions! I saw myself in the looking-glass. I opened my eyes; I saw and I understood. It flashed upon me like a revelation, for the first time in my life, that I was a plain woman.

And so I am. I cannot be called frightful, or even extremely ugly: I have a bridge to my nose, and my teeth do not stick out like tusks; there is no one thing radically wrong about my face. We feel with some people that if their mouth were smaller, their forehead less protruding, or their eyes larger, they would be good-looking; but I could suggest no one change which would render me attractive. I ought to be made all over again. My nose is perhaps my worst feature—it is too large and fat. Still Nature might give me a good nose, and that alone would not make me handsome. I am common-looking, with fat cheeks and a double chin. I am short, and I

have a bad figure. My hair is of no particular colour, and it would be hard to say if my eyes are grey or green. I have positively no complexion. I am not plain enough for my ugliness to be spoken of; I am too plain to be remarked. I might slip through life and die unnoticed—I might say unseen, only I am too stout to be altogether invisible.

As I sat gazing at my own real self, I could not understand how my imagination could ever have led me dreaming so far away from likelihood and truth; but as I wondered, I felt I had two natures within me, and the one discovered the other to be a fool.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT JANE prophesied as melancholy a future for her only brother's only son as ever she did for her only sister's only daughter. His very appearance shocked her: it was not that of a "truly Christian gentleman." Almost from childhood Denis wished to be a "swell," and he was a "swell" before he had quite left school. He has an easy, jaunty sort of manner, and there is a very perceptible touch of swagger about him. He is six-foot-one, and gives you the impression that he thinks himself a very handsome man; and he is handsome. I once overheard a lady with whom he had flirted (as she thought, heartlessly) take him to pieces. She called his mouth an unsteady thing, which wanted a good firm chin to keep it quiet in its right place. She wondered his lips were not tired of lisping and smiling. This lady did not admire my cousin's nose; she declared it was drawn down, and the nostrils distended by a conscious effort. She allowed that Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone's forehead might be called a white one; she let him have lively, light-blue eyes, but she refused them much expression.

From the way I heard this lady disparage Denis's good looks, I must say I wondered she had ever flirted with him. Yet even her disappointed feelings could not uncurl his fair hair or dull the glow of his bright complexion.

Long ago my cousin was particularly vain of a not very small foot or high instep: he used to wear very tight boots, and say they pressed on his instep. His hand, though white, is bigger than he might wish; and he was always complaining that his gloves were a size too large. Denis lost his mother in early childhood, and became a complete orphan at the age of twelve. So, till he was twenty-one, the Chancellor managed his money matters. This "old fool did not give a fellow enough to dress upon;" therefore, when Denis came of age, he owed his tailor £2000. He was proud of this debt, and boasted of it to his merest acquaintance. "Confound that old fool of a lawyer! He would cut a fellow down to one coat and a pair of bags! Hanged impertinence! When a fellow has the fortune of a gentleman!"

My cousin has about £5000 a-year, but he talks as if he had twenty at least, and keeps up the establishment of a man of large fortune without apparently being in debt. He certainly has, rent-free, a fine old country place, inherited through a long line of ancestors; and this gives him a good position in his county. Aunt Jane cannot imagine how Denis keeps out of debt, though she is always trying to do so. Uncle Sherbrook knows to a penny what my cousin's fortune

really is. My uncle and Denis are next-door neighbours in the country. There is only the little village of Harefield between their avenue-gates.

As far as I look back across my early life, I can remember Denis being always with us—at first living under our roof, and then coming constantly to our house. We saw him when he ran up to town from Harrow on a holiday. Once or twice when he was ill my mother nursed him; and when his teeth were drawn or stuffed, we consoled him after his visit to the dentist. He was easy to console, for he did not long remember pain, and I doubt if even pleasure made a lasting impression on his mind. My mother loved Denis as a woman will love a boy when she has no son of her own. She indulged and spoilt him exactly as she would have done her own son; and she took his part valiantly with Aunt Jane, for Denis was a subject of prayer at Sherbrook Hall. My aunt would frequently feel called upon to speak seriously to Denis. She flattered herself she had great influence with young men.

I remember being once present when Aunt Jane was speaking a *word in season* to my cousin. “Denis,” said she, solemnly and with a deep sigh,—“Denis, your uncle and I are much grieved by your levity and unprofitable conversation, but your soul may perhaps yet be saved from eternal damnation.”

I cried out, “It is too late, Aunt Jane!”

“Yes, I am altogether a lost sheep!” exclaimed my cousin. Aunt Jane was too much shocked to speak.

"I heard you telling mamma the day before yesterday, Aunt Jane," I continued, half innocently, half maliciously, "that there was no hope whatever of Denis's eternal salvation. You said he was a child of Satan, and a frivolous vessel of wrath. I particularly remember your calling him a frivolous vessel of wrath; for I thought it must be such a funny kind of vessel."

"Well done, Aunt Jane!" exclaimed my cousin, with great glee. "There is no one like a pious lady for damning a fellow. I am d——d! There is an end of it! It must be certain, for Aunt Jane is always in the right. I appeal to you, Sophy; is our respected aunt ever in the wrong?"

"Never!"

By this time poor Aunt Jane had recovered the use of her tongue. She accused me of arguing. She was really angry, and she administered to me the reproof I deserved; but unfortunately, when she had delivered herself of this word in season, Denis had slipped from the room.

The next time we met, my cousin called me an "awful brick." "I hope, Sophy, Aunt Jane was not more than an hour blowing you up for the good of your soul?"

I answered pettishly—"Oh indeed, Denis, you ran away, and left my poor sinful soul to suffer for both of us. It is not fair to a miserable sinner like me."

My cousin remarked philosophically that women fought best with women. "But as I said before, Sophy,

you are an awful brick ; so come and I will show you, as a reward for your pluck, the locket I bought for Julia."

Julia was sister to one of the "fellows" at Haine's. My cousin had been "cramming" six months for the army—ever since he left Harrow. He lived with us, but was supposed to "cram" all day long at Haine's. He managed, nevertheless, to appear in Rotten Row every day between twelve and two. Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook rightly thought this a shocking waste of precious time; but mamma maintained that Denis having bought a horse, had better ride him.

"Sophy," said my cousin, taking the locket from its red-velvet case, "you know I lost on Sparrowhawk?"

"No, I did not know it, Denis; besides, I thought you and Julia only bet gloves."

"At first we bet gloves—now we bet lockets. Do you suppose when a fellow is in love he sticks at gloves?"

I asked Denis if Julia always gained the bet; and he answered, to my surprise, "Sophy, you are an idiot!"

The locket was of unburnished gold. It was as big as a watch, and there were three capital J's engraved upon it in blue enamel—one J was straight, the other two were turned topsy-turvy. I was loud in my admiration. "And how lovely Julia will look when she wears this locket!"

"Humph!" replied my cousin, with the air of a

connoisseur; "yes, Julia is a fine girl. Magnificent seat on horseback!—a light hand!—a good deal of dash about her!—and, by Jove, a neat foot!" Denis kicked a piece of coal from the hearth into the fire-place. "A woman," said he, "is nothing without a foot."

The way my cousin would speak of this Julia always puzzled and dazzled me.

When the locket was given to Julia, I inquired how the young lady liked the present. Denis assured me she was greatly pleased with it. "But she says, Sophy, the ring at the top ought to have been a blue enamel, and not a gold one; so I have sent the thing back to the jeweller."

"I wonder Julia was so indelicate as to find fault with a present," said I.

My cousin laughed pityingly. "Sophy, you are a regular Miss Jenny! You know nothing of society!" This was true, and I felt humiliated.

About two months after Julia received the locket, I found my cousin sitting alone in the drawing-room by twilight. I asked whom he was thinking of, that he looked so melancholy? He sighed, "I am thinking, Sophy . . . Haw! . . . I am thinking of the person I love best in this world."

I whispered, "You are thinking of Julia. Oh, Denis, won't she marry you?"

My cousin jumped in his chair; he stamped impatiently. "Well, Sophy!" he exclaimed, energetically, "I must say you are the greatest moke that

ever lived ! Do you suppose a fellow marries his first love ? ”

I gave no answer ; I only blushed for my ignorance.

“ Miss Julia has seen the last of me,” said my cousin, severely.

I asked, “ Does not Julia love you any more ? ”

“ By Jove, I should rather think she did ! ”

“ Then it is you, Denis, who do not want to marry poor Julia ? ”

“ Oh, she is a fine girl, but *passée*, decidedly *passée* ! Twenty-five if she is a day ! ” he said, contemptuously, “ and I find she has accepted gloves and lockets from half the fellows at Haine’s.”

“ That was because Sparrowhawk won,” said I ; “ you ought to blame the jockey and not poor Julia.”

My cousin burst out laughing, and exclaimed,— “ Sophy, there is no use in talking to you ; you understand nothing. I was going to tell you a secret, but I won’t.”

I pressed him to tell me, for I dearly loved secrets in those days.

“ Well, then, guess, Sophy. Of whom was I thinking ? ”

“ Is the person dead ? ”

“ Dead ? Nonsense ! but when a man thinks of the human being he loves best in the world, he does not giggle.”

“ Is it a gentleman ? ”

Denis seemed greatly amused at this idea. “ By Jove,” he said, “ it is Uncle Sherbrook ! ”

"No, it is not. I see now it is a lady."

My cousin suggested Aunt Jane or the Catechism, for he felt sure the Catechism was of the female sex. At length he said I could never guess, "for how could you when you never saw her?" He then told me *her* was a certain Emily, "the most lovely girl that ever breathed. Beats Julia hollow." He had met this charming creature in the Row every day for the last week, her brother having introduced her to him just ten days ago. He felt himself to be hopelessly in love with her.

"Do fellows marry their second love?" I asked, most innocently; "or do they wait till the third?"

"By Jove, Sophy, you are silly! I shall never love any one on earth but Emily. I adore her. I intend to propose, and I hope the governor won't refuse."

My imagination was highly interested in the lovely Emily; and yet I did not like to inquire any more about her, fearing that instead of Emily there might be a Mary or a Fanny. The "governor" may have refused, for my cousin never spoke of Emily again: perhaps I had heard too much of Julia, or perhaps he had come to the age when a young man keeps his love affairs to himself.

When Denis conceived this passion for the charming Emily, he was on the verge of his examination. Shortly afterwards his name appeared 130th on the list for direct commissions.

The regiment to which he was gazetted was quartered for two years at Aldershot. When Uncle

Sherbrook was with us, he used constantly to see Denis walking and driving about town, yet my cousin only came twice to our house. The first time we happened to be out, so did not see him; and the second we were at home, but he did not come in. He told John he could only leave his card, as he was on his way to the Great Western to catch the Windsor special train, for he was going to spend the Ascot week at Windsor. John told Snipkins (Snipkins told Aunt Jane) that from Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone's look and manner, he, John, judged Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone must be going to stay with the Queen at Windsor Castle. I looked in Uncle Sherbrook's 'Morning Post,' and saw the Queen had gone to Osborne, so it must have been the Prince of Wales whom Denis honoured by his company.

We met my cousin the following week walking in Rotten Row, and his head was so completely turned that he did not even know us. Indeed for a moment I must allow I hardly recognised him. He was dressed remarkably—just beyond the height of the fashion. He wore his hat much cocked on one side; he held up a cigar between the first and second fingers of a pale-yellow glove, the little finger stuck out—it was the hand of an affected woman. Altogether my cousin had an affected and stiffened look about him which amazed me—it was so unnatural, so unlike his former self. I declare he looked like some disjointed doll: his legs might have belonged to any one, and he held his arms in a peculiar pointed-elbow fashion which

shortened his coat-sleeves. It seemed as if he were particularly anxious the populace should remark his white shirt-cuffs, so perhaps he had a prince's plume engraved upon his studs.

At the end of the two years, Uncle Sherbrook heard Denis's regiment was ordered out to Canada. We did not see Denis before he started. My mother often said she was sure he had wished to bid us good-bye before he left, and that some accident only could have prevented him. My mother was right: Denis had wished to say good-bye, but could not quite manage it. We received a letter of apology from him. He had been staying up in town before he started, with Travis, Lord Furley's eldest son; but he and Travis had been so gay going about everywhere, that positively he had not had a moment to himself. My mother said it was just like dear Denis to think of writing such a thoughtful, affectionate letter.

CHAPTER III.

TIME passed on. I was eighteen years of age, and the Sherbrooks were anxious I should be presented at Court, my uncle even more so than my aunt. He seemed to think my ancestors would have wished me to kiss the Queen's hand. All very fine of my ancestors; but if they intended me to cut a figure at Court, they should have entailed their fortune and not their nose upon me. As we were not in the Court circle, and had but little chance of being invited to Marlborough House or the Queen's concert at Buckingham Palace, mamma and I thought Court dresses a ridiculous expense. We did not tell this to the Sherbrooks, for fear they might imagine they were called upon to make us a present of our trains. Not, however, that there was much chance of their doing so. Except tracts, my uncle and aunt had never given me anything; yet they were very generous to the Blacks.

So it happened that important person Sophy Thursley did not make her *début* at Court, but "came out" at a ball given by her old friend the Clarks. When

I say old friends, I mean old London friends. Ever since I can remember, the Clarckes were on visiting terms with us. Sir Henry was a friend of my father. Each spring when they came up to town from their place in Nottinghamshire, Lady Clarke called, and we called in return, and before leaving town she never failed to leave a P.P.C. One year we never met at all, for we were not at home when she called, and she was out when we called. Three or four times in my youth I was invited to take tea in the schoolroom with Julia, Fanny, and Louisa Clarke. I did not enjoy myself. I disliked the governess. She was always teasing and persecuting the girls, and keeping them in such order that they had not a word to say. I have heard Lady Clarke call Miss Harding "a treasure! and she is so careful with the dear girls' manners;" which really meant, every time they speak she snubs them. And the result was, the "dear girls" had no conversation whatever, except their whispered confidences about Miss Harding—who, they said, ate quantities of cakes and buns in her bedroom—could be called conversation. I did not much care for the Clarckes. I liked pretty little Louisa perhaps the best. She wanted me to be her "particular friend," and have "secrets." She wrote to me once when she was about sixteen. She hoped her *dear* Sophy was *quite* well; she hoped *dear* Mrs Thursley was *quite* well also; and she hoped, when *last* we heard from Dullshire, Mrs Sherbrook was *quite* well. She was sorry to tell me Julia's pony had hurt its leg,

but she hoped it would *soon* be well again. She said the weather was *wet*, but hoped it would soon be *quite fine* again. And now, said she, "*I must* say good-bye; and hoping soon to hear from you, I remain, my dear Sophy, your affectionate friend,

"LOUISA CLARCKE."

The blotless letter was beautifully written with a steel pen. Miss Harding had evidently presided over the crossing of the t's. This was the first note I had received from a girl of my own age. I supposed it was the right thing for a young lady to be hopeful when she wrote to her friends; so I got a new pen, and hoped Louisa was quite well, and that Fanny and Julia were quite well, and that Sir Henry and Lady Clarke were quite well, and that Julia's pony was quite well. I also hoped it would not rain any more; and then I found I had come to an end of my hopes! My letter was not more than a page long, while Louisa had hoped on for a page and a half. I suddenly thought of Miss Harding, so I hoped her appetite was as good in Nottinghamshire as in London; and then hoping I should soon hear from dear Louisa, I remained her affectionate friend,

SOPHY THURSLEY.

This last hope was not fulfilled. Louisa never wrote to her affectionate friend again. Miss Harding read all their letters, and was very angry I had hoped her appetite was good in Nottinghamshire. I feared I

should have hoped too little ; and, alas ! I had hoped too much.

As a child I felt both pity and contempt for the Clarkes ; they were so deadly dull and stiffly well-behaved. Strange to say, when they “came out,” they were decidedly “fast,” and conceived a contempt for me ! They rode in the morning, drove in the afternoon, were more or less in society all day long, and went to two or three parties each night. They despised an unfashionable like me, who kept neither horse nor carriage. They would not have called our hired fly a carriage ; but, above all, they looked down disdainfully on a young lady who did not “go out” more than a dozen times during the season.

The Sherbrooks were with us when we received the invitation to the Clarkes’ ball. As Aunt Jane thought balls wrong, she sighed, and groaned, and shook her curls. Uncle Sherbrook said nothing : not unfrequently this was a sign he intended to say something very serious at another time. Luckily, he forgot to do so : a letter arrived from his Harefield attorney, and he and my aunt went down to Sherbrook on very important business, which I naturally fancied must be about that everlasting right of way.

The morning of the ball, I got a letter of excellent advice from my aunt. She drew a picture of the vanities and temptations of the ball-room : she cautioned me very seriously against the danger of flirtation ; she told me a passing admiration was not attachment, and said agreeable partners were heartless ;

she ended by imploring me not to dance the fast dances. When I read this letter, I felt as if I were posterity. It was a letter to publish for the edification of generations to come. I do hope Aunt Jane may have influence with posterity; it would be a satisfaction to her! I imagine she would have more influence with the present generation were she endowed with a slight sense of the ridiculous, and with a greater sense of the fitness of things.

I remembered Aunt Jane's good advice, and smiled as I looked in the glass and gave the last touch to my back hair. I thought no one would care to flirt with my nose, though its name is written in the Doomsday-Book. I am so accustomed to my own appearance that I never think of it, except on rare occasions like this one, and then I console myself and gratify my pride by fancying I must be the very image of the Doomsday-Book Thorslea. I am not a bit like either my father or my mother; and one thing is certain, I never could have invented myself. Stupid old Anglo-Saxon, I am proud of you! but why did not your nose die with you?

asking for The Clarckes lived at Prince's Gate. We were asked for half-past ten. There was some mistake about ordering the carriage, so we did not arrive till near twelve. I feared we were very late, particularly as we met two ladies in the hall ~~ordering~~ their carriage. I heard one say, "Thomas is most provoking! At this rate we shall never find time for the Hartinoors'. We must go to the Lerekers' and Seymours'." "My

dear," said the other, "Lady Julia will never forgive us unless we go to her."

I felt reassured, and more so when, on passing into Sir Henry's study, fitted up as a dressing-room, we found two other arrivals taking off their cloaks. One a tall, rather stylish, dark-eyed, very sallow lady, extremely *décolletée*, and of that certain age which decidedly is not young, nor yet quite old. Her daughter (I imagined her to be so) was a fine, tall dasher: she looked as if she ought to have had an aide-de-camp in full regimentals at her heels.

The elder lady dropped one of the morone velvet bows off her yellow dress, and I picked it up and gave it to her. She looked at me as if she would like to say, "I don't know you. Who are you?" A maid pinned on the bow, and then both ladies, drawing themselves up to their full height, sailed from the room with their tails flowing behind them. My mother politely moved aside to let them pass, and they stared at her. The younger lady had an eye-glass; the elder had none: so the stare of the younger was the more difficult to bear. My mother blushed and whispered, "That is an awful eye-glass, Sophy!" "Awful!" said I. A servant showed us across the hall to the dining-room, and there we saw the eye-glass taking a cup of tea. "We will go up-stairs, Sophy," said my mother. She was a shy woman by nature, who hated to be stared at; and till now, she had gone out nowhere since my father's death, thirteen years ago.

So we went up-stairs. Unluckily, my mother's lace

caught in the last turning of the banisters. I could not untwist it. I tried, and she tried, in vain. While thus occupied, the eye-glass and her chaperone brushed past us with difficulty, for there was really no room. The end of the chaperone's long yellow train wound itself round about my foot. I nearly fell. Recovering my balance, I unwound my lady's tail and squeezed myself against the wall. Though not in fault, I said, as I thought with much politeness, "I beg your pardon." Oh, what a look her Highness of the yellow tail gave me! I suppose she was now quite sure I intended to make her acquaintance. The sniff of her nostril was ridiculous; but I did not even smile, for I felt the daughter's eye-glass was upon me.

We were astonished to hear these two flashy ladies announced as "Mrs and Miss Thursley." My mother jumped from surprise, and disentangled her lace by tearing it. Lady Clarcke laughed and came forward to receive her guests. Our namesakes stopped short with horrified countenances. The elder lady corrected the footman in a loud indignant voice: "Lady Tutterton and Miss Tutterton," cried she, and the servant said nothing. Thursley had come first up the stairs to him through a footman and a waiter, so how was he to know that Tutterton would take precedence in person of Thursley? Her ladyship having announced herself, passed on.

"Never mind, my dear Georgina!" cried Lady Clarcke after her; "at any rate I know who you are!"

We shook hands with our hostess *incognito*—the puzzled servant remaining dumb.

"It is warmer this evening, Lady Clarcke," said my mother.

"And delighted I am to hear it, Mrs Thursley."

"This is the coldest June I ever remember," continued my mother.

"So I think," said Lady Clarcke; "but Sir Henry declares he recollects twenty years ago just such another chilly June."

"How is Sir Henry? I hope he is quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you. He was here this minute. Perhaps he is watching the young people dance," and Lady Clarcke pointed with her fan to the front drawing-room. She smiled, and we smiled, and we tried to move through a great crowd towards the dancing-room. The Tuttertons seemed to make their way without difficulty. The yellow-tailed bird of paradise in her ladyship's chignon was nodding inside the doorway. Yet my mother came to a dead stop; she hated pushing.

The music had ceased, and a file of dancers, the gentlemen going sideways first, and the ladies following, cut the army of chaperones in two. Mamma retreated down the first step of the stairs, and I found myself driven into the back drawing-room, and then shut up in a corner behind a table, on which was a large red velvet stand, like a miniature staircase, covered with great big pots of azaleas and ferns. A stout, and I should say a slightly rouged dowager,

bustle/ with a large ~~crinoline~~, became imprisoned in this corner next me, but on the outer side. This lady had numerous acquaintances, who shook hands across the more distant end of the table with "Lady Arabella," as they called her, and stopped just long enough to remark the evening was a warm one, and to hope the hot weather was coming at last. "What a cold June we have had, Lady Arabella!" Her ladyship would then reply it was the coldest month of June she ever remembered.

After a time, I felt bored with the chilly month of June, and longed to escape from my prison behind Lady Arabella's flounces. I had almost made up my mind it was just possible to get past the ~~crinoline~~, *fur belows* ~~crinoline~~, when a voice, coming across from the other side of the table, cried, "I have found you out at last, Lady Arabella!" My lady turned round with a whisk and rustle, and her skirt and her puffings seemed twice as large as before. I looked up and saw the bird of paradise fluttering its tail over the azaleas at my side.

"Ah, Lady Tutterton, is it you?"

"My dear Lady Arabella! Why, you are quite hidden away in that odious corner."

"Yes, indeed, and in a very warm corner too, I can assure you."

"Oh, my dear Lady Arabella, how I do pity you! Such a warm evening as it is! What a month of June we have had!"

And Lady Arabella once more remarked that she never remembered so cold a June.

"Dreadful!" said Lady Tutterton—"quite too dreadful! and my poor Georgina was perfectly hoarse the other night at that Mrs Elmer's concert."

We had a slight acquaintance with a Mrs Elmer-Elmer, who gave musical parties, so I listened with more interest than to the month of June. "But, my dear Lady Tutterton," said Lady Arabella, "Miss Tutterton was in excellent voice. Not that I should be surprised, I must say, at any one catching their death of cold in that Mrs Elmer's great, bare music-room," and Lady Arabella shrugged her shoulders as if she had the shivers. "You have heard about poor dear Prince Teck?" continued Lady Tutterton; "that Mrs Elmer—I beg pardon! Mrs Elmer-Elmer's draughts have given him a stiff neck and the influenza." The voice which mentioned the Duke of Teck was one of sympathetic sorrow. I thought, "Why, here is a lady who must be a bosom friend of all the Royal family. If one of their husbands, even a lesser one, gets a cold, she almost cries!"

Lady Arabella laughed. "That naughty man Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone made such a wicked riddle!" . . . Rigardy-Wrenstone! my cousin? Impossible! I was amazed, and listened with real interest this time. "But indeed," said Lady Arabella, "it was too bad of Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone! Excuse me, I can't help laughing when I think . . . I could not . . . pray don't ask me."

"Now really, Lady Arabella——"

"Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone would never forgive me."

"Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone shall never know, my dear Lady Arabella."

"I declare, Lady Tutterton, you are as wicked as Mr Rigardy - Wrenstone himself! Just fancy . . . But really I cannot."

"My dear Lady Arabella, I shall never guess! I never guessed but one riddle in my life."

"Then I will ask you the question; but mind, I decline to tell the answer. It is the answer which is so very, very naughty! What is the difference between that Mrs Elmer and the influenza?"

"The one," began Lady Tutterton, slowly—"the one . . . no, it can't be . . . yes . . . no . . . let me see. Ah yes! I declare I think I have it, Lady Arabella; the one caught a Prince, and the Prince caught the other. Capital! capital!"

"Lady Tutterton, I never, never should have asked you if . . . but you have heard it before?"

"My dear Lady Arabella! I can assure you, Lady Arabella——"

"Well, remember, Lady Tutterton, I did not tell you!"

At this moment the eye-glass came up leaning on . . . Denis!—Denis, whom we imagined to be still in Canada, and not coming home till the next mail! I took one look to make sure. Yes, it was he—a little older and with a light moustache, but still a good deal out of joint, and searching for his shirt-cuff with the arm on which Miss Tutterton was not leaning. Denis could not see me. My first impulse was to press forward; my second, to shrink back into my corner.

I was surprised ; I was mortified to think Denis should be in London and not have come to see my mother, who was so fond of him !

I peeped through the azaleas and saw Lady Tutterton—the playful kitten !—put up her fan, half hiding her face. She exclaimed, “ Oh, Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone, I am shocked ! ”

“ Really, Lady Tutterton—— ”

“ Oh, Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone, you pretend not to know ? To be so amusing, and so original, and so clever, and so very, very wicked, and then to seem as if . . . Oh, you hypocrite ! ” And Lady Arabella chimed in with a “ Fie ! fie ! ”

My cousin looked greatly pleased, and again repeated, “ Really, Lady Tutterton—— ”

“ For shame ! for shame, Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone ! And that poor dear Mrs Elmer-Elmer ! It is too cruel ! now positively too cruel ! Georgina, my dear, shall I tell you what difference there is between Mrs Elmer-Elmer and the influenza ? ”

“ Thankee ; I know ! ” replied the eye-glass, abruptly ; “ Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone told me. Awfully good ! Thought I should die laughing ! ”

“ Don’t die, my dear,” exclaimed Lady Arabella ; “ remember you must live till Monday. Surely you do not forget Monday, Miss Tutterton ? ” Her ladyship did not wait for an answer. She answered herself—“ No, no ; you don’t forget. I know you have the greatest pleasure in singing at my house—so very kind of you ! But all our best amateurs are delighted

to sing for me, because I never give my friends cold like that Mrs Elmer. I am——” Lady Arabella interrupted herself suddenly—“My dear Miss Tutterton! but I was quite forgetting! I have a great favour to ask of you. You will sing a solo for me on Monday? Now say you will.”

“Thought we were to have no solos, Lady Arabella.”

“But we really must have just one little exception to our rule,” cried her ladyship, “and that exception must be Miss Tutterton. The Pasha said to me yesterday (he speaks French like a Frenchman), ‘*Miladi Arabella, la prima-donna*’ (of course he meant you, my dear)—‘*la prima-donna va chanter un solo pour nous Lundi prochain.*’” Lady Arabella spoke French better than Aunt Jane, but not as the present generation of Ladies Arabella speak it. She continued—“‘*Mong Pacha, je lui ferai votre demande*;’ and he answered, with the bow of the Grand Monarque, ‘*Je vous en remercie beaucoup, miladi.*’ What polish! What delightful, easy, agreeable manners that fascinating Bey has, to be sure! And to think he is a Turk! I always call him *mong marquis turc*! Quite a marquis of the *ancien régime*!”

“And the fez is *so* becoming a dark complexion!” exclaimed Lady Tutterton.

“Haw!” said my cousin; “Pasha not a bad fellow. Met him other night at Furley’s. Miss Tutterton, Lancers are over. Our waltz, last waltz! Lerekers have a ball on to-night. Must go to Hartmoor’s. Awful bore!”

The eye-glass, smiling and bowing, but more awkwardly than graciously, took Denis's proffered arm and marched off under a volley of polite little spasmodic ejaculations from Lady Arabella. "A thousand thanks! So very kind! Next Monday! You are too good! I am quite overcome! What a dear, good-natured creature she is, Lady Tutterton!"

"Poor dear Georgina! It is a sad, sad pity she is so timid," said the flattered mother. "It is a sad, sad pity; but who can blame her? I am so shy myself. When I was her age, I used to flutter all over just——"

"Ah, don't speak of it, Lady Tutterton! I know what it is. I am a martyr to shyness myself. Even now, when——" And Lady Arabella and Lady Tutterton told each other, through the azaleas, touching anecdotes illustrative of their sensitive and shrinking natures. They pitied themselves, and wished they were more like other people.

I was now out of all patience! I could not imagine what had become of my mother. I burned to tell her whom I had seen, and to know if she had met my cousin. I saw, however, it would be useless pushing to get out of my corner. Lady Arabella could no more move than I could. She was hemmed in by chaperones, some of whom were hopelessly seated; and there were divers tables besides, even worse than chaperones, for they are fixtures who never go down to supper. I fretted, and fumed, and felt so angry, that in my impatience I broke off a twig from one of

the azaleas. My view was much enlarged by this accident, though I could see Lady Tutterton no better than before—just the black chignon and the bird of paradise, one hand, and the velvet bow on her extremely short sleeve; yet I was now enabled to see half the room without the trouble of peeping. There was a break in the crowd. I soon caught sight of my mother's head towering above the surrounding dowagers. My mother was taller than they, and much better-looking, and she knew how to dress herself after a fashion becoming to her age. She had beautiful white hair, which most of the other elderly ladies had not: old ladies nowadays but rarely turn grey. Their locks seem to turn almost any other colour but the one you would expect. And such chignons as they wear to support the tow-rows of lace and lappets, and flowers and ribbons, with which their heads are disfigured! As to Lady Arabella, she wore what I might call the hanging gardens of Babylon on her head. I never saw such roses, and posies, and daffydownillies, trailing here and there and everywhere!

My mother was a very handsome woman. Her head, which she always carried rather far back, was grandly set upon her long and still white neck. Her complexion—the complexion of reddish-auburn hair—was wonderful; for at the time I speak of, she must have been between fifty and sixty years of age, and yet she was what our ancestors would have called a comely woman, fair to look upon. She had a re-

markably distinguished air. I defy any one to have guessed her to be my mother or Aunt Jane's sister. Aunt Jane thought mamma held up her head and looked like Jezebel, for piety and dowdiness were inseparably joined in my aunt's imagination. No matter what my dear mother put on, she always appeared well dressed. This night she wore a silver-grey dress, trimmed with white lace, caught up by large grey bows. Mamma made the bows herself, and I pinned them on; they were pinched and twisted to perfection. There was a dash about them, and I must say the whole effect was striking. Aunt Jane looked askance at her sister's greys and dove-colours, and declared mamma would next wear green and say that was mourning.

I heard Lady Arabella ask Lady Tutterton who the tall person in grey was, "for I know the face as well as my own; but I have such an unfortunate memory for names. Now who can she be?"

"Some sort of widow, I suppose," said Lady Tutterton; "for silver grey is the natural frontier of a bereaved spirit."

"Now, really, you are too witty to-night, my dear Lady Tutterton!" exclaimed Lady Arabella, putting up those heavy gold glasses of hers with the long gold chain. She stared at my mother.

Lady Arabella had a kindly, good-humoured face. She did not look ill-natured when she stared: she only stared as many an English lady does stare—for the pleasure and satisfaction of the thing. She evi-

dently approved of the silver-grey widow, bows and all, for she said, "A fine figure."

"Too stout for my taste," replied the skinny Lady Tutterton.

"Still, decidedly a fine figure," repeated Lady Arabella; "and *très-bien mise*. I certainly feel as if I knew her. If I only knew her name, I should speak to her; for, you see, I have a dozen of my concert tickets that I can't dispose of, and she might take some. Now, really, I do wonder if she can be any one."

"Dear, no," said Lady Tutterton; "I rather imagine the name is Thusby. The footman made a mistake, and announced it instead of ours. Thusby or Thubby, he said; or perhaps it was Thubs."

"Thubs, Lady Tutterton! She does not look the name."

"Then if she does not, Lady Arabella, her daughter does. I suppose it was her daughter—a sort of person who evidently wished to make my acquaintance."

I coughed to show there was some one listening, but the ladies would take no notice.

"My dear Lady Arabella," exclaimed Lady Tutterton at the top of her voice, "as to the daughter, why, you never saw a plainer platterface in your life!"

"Excuse me," I said, with studied politeness. Both ladies started. "Excuse me for interrupting you a moment; but I think, before this conversation goes further, it might be wiser to let the plain platterface out of her corner!"

I stood on tiptoe and peeped over the azaleas. I fancied I caught Lady Tutterton's eye; and yet, perhaps, I was mistaken, for she seemed to be looking the other way, and fanned herself absently. Lady Arabella turned round and faced me. The hanging gardens turned with her, because they were fastened to her back hair; but the ~~crinoline~~ and puffs had not room to turn. They nearly smothered me. Lady Arabella's glasses were still up, and she stared at me with a mixture of dignity and surprise. It was quite ridiculous. I could not help smiling. "I am Miss Thubs. Would you kindly let me pass?"

Poor little Lady Arabella! She really was shocked. She fell into a spasm of apology: "Never imagined . . . Lady Tutterton . . . just a little deaf . . . a strange mistake . . . not at all plain . . . quite charming, my dear!"

"Ah no," said I. "What she said is quite true." I blushed. "I know it myself; only—only I did not think other people would see it as much as I do. I now perceive they remark it more."

Lady Arabella was on the verge of another apology, but I stopped her by begging she would kindly make way and let me escape into the outer world. However, that proved impossible. The crush was now so great, she could not move a step. The ~~crinoline~~, still pushed forward by the table at our side, would stick out the wrong way; and beyond this stronghold of Lady Arabella's, there were barricades of chairs and chaperones. I had to remain where I was. I saw my mother looking about everywhere for me.

/skirt/

bustle

At last I managed to attract her attention by fluttering my fan through the gap in the azaleas. A surge in the moving crowd brought her a little nearer to my prison, but it was in vain she tried to get nearer still. She talked to me on her fingers, but I could not understand a single sign she made: except G and H, I cannot read the deaf and dumb alphabet, though Aunt Jane has often tried to teach it to me, —because “any woman,” says she, “may be called upon to marry a deaf and dumb husband, for the ways of Providence are inscrutable.”

I guessed from mamma’s signs and beckonings that she had seen Denis, and was much surprised. I nodded to her as much as to say, I have seen him too.

“May I ask,” said Lady Arabella, “if the lady——”

“My mother?”

“Ah! so I presumed. The handsome lady in grey —if her name is——”

“Thubs?” I said.

But Lady Arabella looked as if she might again fall into a fit of apology, so I hastened to tell her our real name.

“Thursley?” she repeated. “Ah, to be sure; I know. A near connection of the Dullshire Sherbrooks?”

I explained the relationship.

“And the Sherbrooks,” continued Lady Arabella, “are related to the Stewarts, and the Stewarts are cousins of the Clinchfisted Scotts. A Stewart married James tenth Earl of Clinchfisted.”

"Certainly," said I, though I knew nothing whatever of the matter. I felt safe in thus claiming a titled connection for the Stewarts. Uncle Sherbrook had long ago convinced me there never yet existed a Scotch family that was not nearly related to an earl, a marquis, and a duke.

Lady Arabella hoped to have the pleasure of renewing her acquaintance with Mrs Thursley, if only Mrs Thursley would come a little nearer. She bowed to my mother, and my mother bowed to her. Lady Arabella told me she had met Mrs Thursley in Dullshire. She knew Harefield well. The Sherbrooks and Wrenstones were old friends; but Mrs Thursley had married and left the county before Lady Arabella came into it. Lady Arabella said she had a great respect for Mr Sherbrook. "Excellent man, Mr Sherbrook! Admirable woman, Mrs Sherbrook!"

I repeated, "Admirable!"

"So interested in the civilisation of the Negro race!"

"Oh yes!" said I. "At one time she was always hemming pocket-handkerchiefs for the Blacks; but she does not do so any more, she——"

"I know, I know!" interrupted Lady Arabella. "We have perhaps been more anxious latterly to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of the benighted inmates of the Turkish harems."

"The concert tickets!" said I to myself.

"I have almost," continued Lady Arabella, "made my Pasha promise he will only have one wife when

he returns to Constantinople; and she is not to wear only a short petticoat and long . . . long . . . *de longs pantalons*," whispered her ladyship.

"Indeed!" cried I.

"Yes," said Lady Arabella. "I am now trying to get up a subscription for the promotion of long black silk skirts amongst the Turkish ladies."

"Admirable charity!" said I.

"They must be silk," said Lady Arabella; "the conceited creatures would not wear alpaca. From what I hear, I consider the dress of the seraglio far too gaudy: bright colours foster vanity in the half-civilised mind, and the Turks are only in the second degree of civilisation."

"Ah! just so. And the Turkish ladies are to have black silk skirts? Will you also give them ~~crino~~ *bustles?* lines?"

I am sorry to say I got no answer to this question; for there was a great stir in the host of dowagers—chairs creaked, ladies stood up and trod on each other's dresses, and apologised or scowled as the case might be. The few elderly gentlemen offered their arm to a few elderly ladies. Sir Henry Clarcke was fussing about, looking to the right, to the left, in all directions. The company made way for him, and pushed aside chairs; and just as I was asking the question about the *bustles* ~~crinolines~~ up he came to take Lady Arabella down to supper. He helped her from her corner; she turned to say a parting word to me. "There are one or two tickets for my concert not yet

disposed of. Mrs Thursley and Mrs——” Before she had finished her sentence, I had slipped from my prison. I thought I could finish it for her: “Mrs Thursley and Mrs Sherbrook would, I am sure, like to take them.” I knew my dear mother had not much money to spare for stray charities, and I did not think she would care to contribute towards the promotion of black silk petticoats in the Turkish harems.

“Sophy,” said my mother, “I could not speak to him. I saw him go away. Have you seen him?”

“I have.”

“He must have arrived yesterday. I know Denis arrived yesterday, or he would have come—he would have come to see me; I know, Sophy, he would have come. Though perhaps he could not get his luggage, or he was prevented by——” and my mother ran through a list of probable and improbable excuses. She talked on for five minutes, repeating every now and then, “Your Aunt Jane may say what she likes; he is very fond of me. He would have come, Sophy, if he could; I know he would.”

I listened and said nothing. At last mamma changed the conversation, and asked me if I had been dancing.

“What!” she exclaimed; “has no one asked to be introduced to you? Most extraordinary!”

She looked hurt.

“In my youth,” said she, “gentlemen always asked to be introduced to the nice young ladies.”

"Perhaps they do so still, dear; but nice means pretty, and pretty does not mean me."

"Nonsense, Sophy!" cried my mother. "Hold up your head, my love; you are the most spirited-looking girl in the room."

I wonder she did not tell me I was the handsomest! I smiled to see her so blind. However, on the whole, I rather think it is pleasanter, when you know you are ugly, for your friends to be a little blind.

My mother led the way to the ball-room.

"Come, Sophy," she said; "if Mr David Scott is still here, he will dance with you. I was speaking to him a short time ago. He never forgets that day when he and I sold worsted-work together for the benefit of Lady Arabella's Blacks. He is her nephew."

"Mamma," said I, "Lady Arabella hopes to renew her acquaintance with you."

"Then," cried my mother, "the Hottentots are short of handkerchiefs!"

"No," I said; "it is the sultanas who want petticoats."

The crush was now much less. My mother peeped into the ball-room.

"He is dancing!" she exclaimed. "How unlucky!"

Before the gallop was finished, Lady Clarke sent mamma down to supper with an old gentleman.

Lady Clarke spoke to me, but did not offer to introduce any one for the next dance. I felt a little disappointed, as I should have liked to dance. I stood in the doorway and watched the waltzers. My long-

ing spirit beat time to the music, and I wished I was a pinch of what Aunt Jane would call "pretty, flirting, silly dust and ashes." I had often heard my aunt speak a word in season on the subject of flirting. As I was not intimate with any young lady but myself, I had no idea what sort of crime it was, and I naturally felt most anxious to discover. That is the worst of sermons. They reveal the unsuspected, and make us inquisitive about undreamt-of sins. I wondered if I should see any one flirt; and I hoped I should.

I looked around me, and my roving eyes fell upon my old acquaintance, pretty little Louisa Clarke. She was not dancing, but stood talking to, or rather smiling at, her partner. Louisa's mouth never quite shut. If she had had anything to say, there would have been no trouble in saying it. Nature had parted those cherry lips; yet they rarely spoke—they only smiled.

As a child Louisa was always smiling when not actually crying. She never wept for long, but those tender blue eyes of hers filled easily with tears. They were pretty, sleepy eyes, with drooping lids and brown lashes, and tears became them. Indeed I never saw any one look pretty when crying except Louisa. There was no passion, no reddening convulsion, in her childish grief; she just melted away!

But now she was all soft smiles; and very charming she looked to my eye in her white ball-dress, with her wavy light hair and her dimpled pink cheeks.

Her partner's conversation seemed to delight her; and he naturally appeared much pleased at the effect of his own agreeability. He had an eager, lively air, and spoke with much animation.

As I write, I seem to see that eager, lively look. I see David stand before me as he stood that night with Louisa smiling by his side. For this is one of the pictures in my life. When I look back over the past dim years, I feel as if I walked through some long and deserted gallery, where here and there on the mouldering wall hangs a brightly coloured picture. I stop, and gaze, and wonder at its brilliancy where all else is grey and dim. Thus, when my memory looks back upon this picture of Louisa and David as I saw them at my first ball, it is all so vivid, that my heart beats time to the music, and the dancers waltz by me again.

But at the moment I never dreamt I was receiving a lasting impression. I merely felt bored. I was tired of standing the whole evening doing nothing, so I leant against the open door and watched Louisa in a listless, sleepy fashion. I hardly knew I was watching her, till I heard a lady behind me whisper to another lady at my elbow, "That Miss Louisa Clarke, the youngest daughter, is an accomplished flirt." This, then, is flirting, thought I.

"She is rather pretty," said the one voice.

"Insidious," rejoined the other, "and bad style. I would not allow my daughter to cast eyes——"

I was quite disgusted at these ladies' unkind remarks, when Louisa looked so happy. It seemed to

me like throwing a curse over her beauty. I thought in my heart how pleasant it must be to be talked to and amused; how much pleasanter than the lot of the plain platterface, crushed into corners behind chaperones, and never asked to dance! I sympathised in Louisa's happiness, and felt that flirting was a pleasant, lively thing, and that I, too, should like to flirt.

Many people were now coming up from supper. Fanny and Julia Clarke brushed past me with a nod. They did not do the manners in their own house, or speak to any one, except to the gentlemen with whom they danced. Louisa also passed me with her partner on her way down-stairs, and hardly seemed to know me.

I went out on the lobby and leant over the banisters, and down below in the hall I saw the Tuttertons wrapped in their opera-cloaks, shaking hands with Sir Henry; so I supposed the party was breaking up. I yawned behind my fan, and hoped we should soon go home. I thought balls dull, dreary things, not at all exciting or wicked—quite different from what Aunt Jane had led me to expect. Yawn followed yawn, and time went slowly. At length I caught sight of my mother down below talking to a bundle of shawls and muftes. This I imagined to be Lady Arabella, because I saw trailing leaves and rosebuds appearing through the wrappers. Lady Arabella vanished quickly, and shortly afterwards my mother was brought back to the landing on which I stood, by her old gentleman, who bowed and went off in search of another supperless dowager. /.)

"Sophy," exclaimed my mother, looking quite elated, "I have been most courageous! I have decidedly refused to promote the black-silk petticoat in the Turkish harems. I had just time to say no when Lady Arabella's carriage was called, and she was forced to run away."

While mamma was speaking, Louisa Clarcke and her partner brushed past us, and went into the dancing-room.

"Ah! there is Mr Scott," said my mother. "I will introduce you to him—now indeed I will."

Before I could stop her, she was gone. I followed her to the ball-room, where the violin was tuning. I found her speaking to Louisa Clarcke's agreeable partner, and I perceived Louisa sitting near the door. My mother introduced the gentleman as Mr David Scott. He was polite enough; but as we were taking our places for the quadrille, I saw him look towards Louisa and give the slightest possible little shrug of his shoulders. Louisa smiled and nodded to him. There was then what I felt to be an awkward silence between Mr Scott and me, so I remarked, like the rest of the world, "It is warmer this evening." And Mr Scott replied, like the rest of the world, "We have had a very cold month of June."

We danced. I enjoyed it. Between times, I tried three or four topics of conversation, but my partner barely answered me. He kept looking towards Louisa, and was at little pains to conceal that he felt bored. When the music stopped, and the dancers went flock-

ing down-stairs, Mr Scott asked me if I would like some supper; but I had pity on him, and thanking him, said no, though I was very hungry. With pleased alacrity he took me back to my mother.

I looked at my watch, and found it was half-past two o'clock. Mamma wanted me to stay a little longer, as she was quite sure Mr David Scott would ask me to dance again, but I persuaded her it was time to go home.

We had some difficulty in getting our carriage. Flymen are not like one's own coachman. The Park gates were closed. The deserted streets looked melancholy. We were both tired, and only spoke twice. Once, in Park Lane, mamma said, "Sophy, it is a thousand pities we could not get near Denis. He would have been very glad to see us." And I said, "I hope so, my dear." And once more, going down Great Cumberland Place, "Sophy," exclaimed my mother, "when your Aunt Jane returns to-morrow, we need not tell her we saw Denis at the ball. She sometimes makes unkind remarks." "She does," said I.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Sherbrooks, attended by the invaluable Sarah Snipkins, arrived in time for luncheon next day. I saw at a glance that "dear Edward" was bilious. He declared the cabman asked too much; and while he was paying exactly the right fare, he would hold his hatbox in one hand and the umbrellas under the other arm. He dropped a shilling, and in picking it up let the umbrellas fall into the mud. Aunt Jane gave a little scream, and Snipkins rushed into the street.

"Mrs Sherbrook's best humbrella, sir!"

"Snipkins, you expect me to carry everything." This was said most severely.

"I've been hasking hof you, sir, for those 'ere humbrellas——" pleaded the injured Snipkins.

"And you will never get them," cried out my uncle; "I know what it is to let other people carry one's umbrella and hatbox."

He took two strides from the cab into the hall. He did not say, "How do you do?"

"One portmanteau," said he, counting the luggage,

"a bonnet-box, the small trunk, the large trunk, two carpet . . . Confound it, Jane! . . ."

"My dear Edward!"

"Confound it, Jane! where is the little black bag?"

I had seen our John take it up-stairs. "It is here, Uncle Sherbrook."

"Be quiet, Sophy!" thundered my uncle.

"But I saw——"

"Hold your tongue, and go into the dining-room."

"Yes, Sophy," exclaimed my aunt; "you would fuss any one. Your uncle and I are never fussy if we are let alone."

I went into the dining-room, and my mother followed me. We could hear Uncle Sherbrook accusing everybody of having lost his little black bag, and Aunt Jane exclaiming piteously that she never lost anything, not even her hand-bag, or her bonnet-box, or her brown shawl.

"And, my dear Edward, the time you lost your hat-box, it was you yourself put it——"

"The time I lost my hat-box?" shouted Uncle Sherbrook.

Luckily at this moment John appeared upon the scene, and said Mr Sherbrook had given him the little black bag before ever he got out of the cab, and had told him to take it straight up to his dressing-room, as Mr Sherbrook was sure it would be lost.

"Quite right, John—quite right," said my uncle; "if I did not take care of that black bag it would have been lost long ago."

Aunt Jane came smiling into the dining-room. "Edward has found the black bag. John had taken it up-stairs."

"Yes, I saw him," said I.

"And why did you not say so? Really, Sophy, you are most provoking."

"My dear aunt, I was going to."

"Hush, Sophy!" said Aunt Jane; for Uncle Sherbrook entered the room, still looking very much upset. I wondered what could be the matter with him. I felt sure it was not merely the little black bag, for I had hardly ever known the Sherbrooks arrive in Montagu Square without there being a fuss about that black bag. It was too large for a hand-bag, and Uncle Sherbrook never would let it go with the rest of the luggage. He was always losing it, or fancying it was lost. Now he generally recovered the black bag and his temper at the same time.

Luncheon was on the table at five minutes past one instead of being punctually at one o'clock. Uncle Sherbrook declared he could not stay to eat anything, as he was in a great hurry off to the city on business. Those who have not heard Uncle Sherbrook or Aunt Jane say the word "business," can have no idea what a solemn, pompous word it is. Aunt Jane is convinced the best constitution in the world would give way if you did not eat three punctual meals a-day. Any trifling with the digestion she considers a matter of grave importance. So with a serious face she persuaded "dear Edward" to eat a cutlet. He ate two,

and with a very good appetite, I thought; but when they were offered to him, he first refused them, and then wondered we did not prefer plain mutton-chops to greasy bread-crumbed cutlets. My mother smiled at me.

When "dear Edward" left the table, Aunt Jane trotted after him into the hall, begging him not to forget his greatcoat.

"It is hot now, my dear," said the affectionate, teasing wife, "but it may be cold before evening."

Uncle Sherbrook did not answer: he banged the hall-door.

My aunt came back to her luncheon, lamenting that dear Edward would catch his death of cold.

"This broiling day, Jane?" said my mother.

"Sophia," replied my aunt, "I regret to say you do not understand the rules of health. If you would have taken my advice——"

Aunt Jane cast her eyes upon me, and I felt the conversation was coming round to "poor dear Sophy" and her spine, so I turned it by saying, "Aunt Jane, I fear Uncle Sherbrook is a little . . . a little . . . bilious to-day."

"Is it the liver, Jane?" asked my mother.

My aunt looked round the room in a mysterious manner.

"We are alone," said I.

"Edward," whispered Aunt Jane, "has . . . business." This awful word was nearly inaudible.

"Business on the liver!" cried I; "what a terrible disease!"

"Sophy," answered my aunt, "if you could be brought to a serious and proper frame of mind, you would understand that our temporary stewardship of this world's goods is a great responsibility. Your uncle knows he has a solemn duty to perform. Sophia," she added, addressing my mother, "Edward has changed his attorney, and I fervently hope and trust he has at last found a Christian . . . person,"—I think Aunt Jane was going to say "gentleman;" but she does not consider an attorney quite a gentleman,—“a Christian person who will serve God, not mammon.”

"Changed his attorney!" cried mamma; "left poor old Jones! I will not leave the old man, Jane, after all these years——"

"To be sure you wont, Sophia! It is all the same to you what a man's religious views are, if he is an Arian, a Unitarian——"

"My dear Jane! Mr Jones an Arian and Unitarian! and both together at the same time!"

Now I do believe Aunt Jane merely said Arian and Unitarian as high-sounding words of abuse. "I don't accuse Mr Jones of anything," continued my aunt. "Mr Jones has his own views, no doubt. I will not say Mr Jones is not what he ought to be; but I must allow, as Snipkins says, that it does not look well in Harefield for Squire Sherbrook's man of business to be seen roving about from one place of worship to another, so that you cannot tell, by looking at his pew on Sunday, if he attends two services or one. As

Snipkins says, when he is off at the meeting-house, or perhaps at a Papist chapel for a change, his empty seat looks as if he did not go to church at all. Indeed, Snipkins says, from what she hears, that she ~~should~~ *would* not be surprised, any Sabbath morning, to see a white cow tethered in Mr Jones's garden, and Mr Jones bowing down to it, like one of those benighted Hindoo heathens in Dr MacShaw's Sabbath tales."

I laughed aloud at the idea of old Jones, the Harefield attorney, worshipping a cow in the small strip of garden between his house and the county road. But my mother was very serious.

"Snipkins! Snipkins! Jane, you shock me!" she exclaimed. "I wonder you can listen to Snipkins's gossip."

"Snipkins," said my aunt, with an injured sniff of the nostril,—“Snipkins is an honest, Christian-minded woman, who has her master's true interest at heart.”

"And her own too, Jane, believe me; it is human nature."

"Yes, yes, Sophia, I know you are prejudiced against poor Snipkins. Truth-telling, straightforward servants always make enemies. Some people, Sophia, do not care to know the sinful practices of their household, and if a high-minded maid tells the truth——"

"Jane! Jane!" exclaimed my mother, out of all patience, "I know what you mean, but I really cannot let Snipkins interfere in——"

"Snipkins," said Aunt Jane,—“poor ^{*}Snipkins! she is dragged into every argument. But I don't wish to

argue with you, Sophia ; you may argue with Sophy if you like."

The door opened, and John entered with a letter. He said a servant was waiting for the answer. I thought the interruption a lucky one.

The note looked very short ; and yet my mother read it twice, and hardly seemed able to understand it. "The servant need not wait, John," she said at last, and then read the letter a third time. "Incomprehensible !" she exclaimed, — "incomprehensible ! when I told Lady Arabella I would not have them ! And guinea tickets ! I told her plainly I would not take them. She understood me perfectly ; and now to write and say that, at my request, she has reserved two seats expressly for Sophy and me, and that if I would kindly send the two guineas by the messenger, she will bring the tickets herself in the course of the afternoon." And my mother again repeated, "Incomprehensible ! incomprehensible !"

All letters made Aunt Jane inquisitive, and now her curiosity was intense. She took Lady Arabella's letter out of mamma's hand and read it. "Why, Sophia," she said, "there is a message for me, and you never gave it to me. Edward and I will certainly take the tickets, and I will really make Edward go, for I know all about this charity : it is an excellent one, and Catherine has been collecting for it ; and Lady Arabella and I have often deplored together the shocking vanity and levity of the wretched unbelieving inmates of the Turkish harems, and Lady Arabella

knows I thoroughly approve of this good work. She is quite right in saying she is sure I shall be delighted to take the concert tickets, and I will send her the two guineas this very moment, with yours, Sophia."

"The servant is gone, Aunt Jane; I heard him shut the hall-door."

"Then I will send the money by Snipkins, and you can send yours too, Sophia."

"But I am not going to take the tickets, Jane."

"Sophia, Sophia, I am astonished you do not care to support this admirable charity, for it is a good work, and it has my warmest approval, and we should indeed consider ourselves blessed in being permitted to be instruments under Providence in the amelioration of the benighted condition of the Mahometan wife and mother. And, Sophia, I heartily share Lady Arabella's views on this subject: and indeed, Sophia, you know you are generally in the wrong, and Edward and I deplore it; but you will never take our advice."

And thus arguing, the truth or the untruth in this matter entirely escaped Aunt Jane's strangely constituted mind, though my mother told her that what she really objected to was having the tickets kept for her "at her own request," when she had distinctly said she would not have them. Yet Aunt Jane still sided with Lady Arabella; not from worldly motives—Aunt Jane is not worldly—but because "whosoever is not for us is against us. Sophia, you do not care to support this excellent charity."

Aunt Jane stayed at home that afternoon to see

Lady Arabella if she called, but we both purposely went out.

When we returned from our walk, we were much relieved to find Lady Arabella had been, and was gone. John said her ladyship had stayed a long time, and that her ladyship on leaving had told him to tell Mrs Thursley how sorry her ladyship was not to see her, and as her ladyship could not wait any longer, she had given John two cards to give Mrs Thursley with her compliments. The cards were two concert tickets.

Lady Arabella had gained the day, for my mother kept them. At first she said she would send them back, but on second thoughts her courage failed her, and she sent the two guineas instead. Lady Arabella was to be met all over Dullshire, and mamma did not want to lay up a quarrel for herself at Sherbrook Hall. Besides, if there was any coolness, and my mother and Lady Arabella cut each other, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would certainly take her ladyship's part. "Dear, good, charitable Lady Arabella!" And many people in Dullshire took their opinion from Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. She, too, was an excellent person, and powerful in her way, though not as yet quite so powerful in the county as Lady Arabella; for Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was merely a pattern of untitled excellence, whilst Lady Arabella Scott represented titled perfection—charity in all its beauty! And how beautiful a thing is titled charity in country parts!

When Lady Arabella left the tickets my mother had refused to take, I cannot help thinking she had

perceived the points in her favour, and had weighed her chances of success. I have since heard of other fashionable patronesses of bazaars and concerts who have fought the good fight with weapons not unlike those of Lady Arabella Scott.

We found Aunt Jane in the greatest excitement after Lady Arabella's visit, for Lady Arabella had told her a great piece of news. My aunt seemed to have forgotten both the Turkish harems and the concert tickets.

"Sophia! Sophia! I have news for you! Denis is not in Canada, he is in town; and he is going to sell out of the army! And he is paying attention to Miss Tutterton, Sir Horace Tutterton's only daughter and only child; and, indeed, Lady Arabella thinks they are actually engaged. He met her at Quebec, for Sir Horace was in command out there. He used to be Colonel Tutterton of the Guards when I used to hear of him, but he is a general now and a K.C.B. I know all about the Tuttertons. Lady Tutterton is Lady Clarke's cousin; besides, Louisa Stewart, Edward's cousin, was nearly related to Sir Horace's only sister's first husband . . . no . . . yes, that was it—I am quite right; it was to Sir Horace's only sister's first husband that she was related—a Fraser of Drumloch . . . no, I meant to say a Malcolm of Craighburn . . . no, I was right after all: I remember he was a Fraser of Drumloch, and when he died she married——"

"Who married whom, Jane?" cried my mother. Her sister's pedigrees and intermarriages irritated her.

Said to Aunt Jane

"~~Kitty Fraser married~~" I suggested; "A truly Christian gentleman, Aunt Jane."

"The Lord forbid I should condemn any one," sighed my aunt; "we are led to hope for the salvation of the Gentiles——"

"And surely of Kitty Fraser too," cried I; but Aunt Jane did not seem at all certain either Kitty Fraser or her husband would be saved. From what Louisa Stewart had told her, she feared Kitty Fraser had Romanist tendencies.

"And the Tuttertons, Sophia, are Ritualistic in their views. Lady Arabella deploras it, and it will be such a misfortune for Harefield. And, indeed, if Denis makes this match, I shall not approve of it."

Mamma said—"Jane, I do not think your opinion will be asked."

"Sophia," replied Aunt Jane, "you were no doubt consulted, on the matter last night, for I hear Denis was at the ball."

"Yes, yes," said my mother, hastily, "but I only saw him at a distance."

"Then, Sophia, it is to be presumed he saw you at a distance also."

"No, he did not see me," exclaimed my mother, reddening with emotion. "Jane, Jane, you are too cruel!" and with flashing eyes she added, "too bitter for a saint!"

"Bitter!" repeated my aunt in amazement. Then dragging down the upper lip, she said, "Sophia, I am astonished you should give way to such violence;"

and she whispered in a reproachful tone, "before Sophy."

I declared out loud that I was not a bit shocked. A very decided "Hush, child!" was the answer.

"Jane," said my mother, casting an appealing look at her sister—"Jane, why do you want me to hate my brother's son, when I loved poor Denis, and he is dead?"

"Yes, indeed, Sophia, and you showed your love by never contradicting him, and always doing what he liked, and spoiling that boy to please him." Aunt Jane's anger was rising. "It was I," she said, "who did my duty, and told him the truth the very last time I went to the Abbey, before he died; and I told him what that boy must inevitably turn out, and I said——" My aunt stopped to take breath.

"You said," cried I, "'foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.' Now I know you did, Aunt Jane."

My aunt reproved me for quoting Scripture. She said I was becoming impious; she had long foreseen this would be the case, but my mother never would take her advice. "No, Sophia has her own ideas of education, and very unsuccessful ~~has~~ she been with her daughter and her nephew; for I am sure Sophy is not what she ought to be, and I never knew a less affectionate or a more ungrateful young man than Denis, though you call him your own boy, Sophia."

"Yes, my own boy," retorted mamma. "Oh, Jane, will you go on for ever?"

"He does not even love you, Sophia."

I was standing beside my mother. "Sophy," she whispered to me, "Denis is fond of us."

Willing to please her, I answered, "My dear, he must love you."

She pressed my hand in hers. "No, Sophy," she murmured; "he does not care for me: he has no heart. I know it. I found it out two years ago. But don't tell your Aunt Jane. I would not tell her for the world." My mother's eyes filled with tears, and she left the room.

My aunt neither heard nor saw her sister, she was far too busy talking to herself. I caught, "Godless young man . . . I always said so . . . My advice." She did not perceive my mother was gone.

"Sophia," she exclaimed, "you are infatuated with the boy!"

"Mamma is not here," said I; "and really, Aunt Jane, you do tease her; you make her ill, you——"

My aunt raised her eyes and one hand to heaven. "When children rise up in judgment against their elders," she cried; and then, with great command of Scriptural language and much volubility, she prophesied every sort of misfortune for me, and more than hinted at my eternal damnation.

I listened with a certain sort of amused indifference. I rarely went to the trouble of getting angry with Aunt Jane. Indeed what is the use of working yourself into a passion with what a person says, when by the time you are really excited you find that person

saying something else—perhaps the contrary; or perhaps she has passed to a different subject altogether? Aunt Jane possessed to a remarkable degree the art of easy transitions. I do not know how she managed them, for when I saw her well under way I but half listened to her. From me, and the melancholy future in store for me, she sailed on quite naturally to Mr Buggle, Uncle Sherbrook's new attorney, —to Snipkins, to punctuality, and even, I believe, to the Liberal Ministry and the modern Babylon. When in good spirits I rather enjoyed what Aunt Jane called "arguing," though of argument there was none; but if I were tired, my aunt bewildered me, and I sank exhausted into silence. Since the Sherbrooks and Snipkins had arrived at the hall-door, the air of our house had seemed to me charged with the most fatiguing sort of sound doctrine; so I felt worn out. I let Aunt Jane talk on for an hour, and just feigned to listen.

When at last Uncle Sherbrook returned from the city, he and Aunt Jane shut themselves up in their bedroom until dinner-time; and when they reappeared to our sight, they looked as if they had been signing their late attorney's death-warrant.

Neither my uncle nor my aunt said a word about Denis's engagement. My uncle's whole mind was engrossed by a far more important matter than a mere wedding. We could see the solemn mystery of "Business" overshadowed him. He awed me. I should hardly have thought it decorous in his

awful presence to have touched on any subject less solemn than the eternal damnation of mankind. Now I never felt this to be quite a safe topic; for when my uncle and aunt vigorously burnt all Papists in hell, I could not refrain from stretching out a helping hand to the condemned Monsieur Tolain—and this set fire to myself, to my mother, and to us all.

My mother and I were glad to be allowed to remain silent during dinner-time. As to Aunt Jane, she drew down her upper lip and tried hard to hold her tongue. She was mysteriously discreet, alluding in parables to persons who looked for figs on thistles, and to good seed sown in good ground, and to Christian principles founded on the rock. She spoke of reeds not broken, but rather staves you could rest on and have peace, feeling confident that your talent was intrusted to a good and faithful servant, who would make it ten talents, and deserve the blessing pronounced in the Gospel, "O good and faithful servant!" Mr Buggle, the new attorney,[†] thought I; but I was silent.

After dinner, Aunt Jane, at Uncle Sherbrook's request, read out two long articles from her pet religious newspaper. They gave an account of the Jesuit plot in England, and conclusively proved the end of the world had come.

It was maddening to hear Aunt Jane read aloud. She read very slowly and in a penetrating voice, and laid powerful emphasis on the doctrine and sentences she liked best. You could do nothing in the room

where she was reading but try not to listen, for she hammered her words like nails into your head.

Ten o'clock came at last, and Uncle Sherbrook read prayers. He always did so in our house. My mother was afraid to read before the Sherbrooks, because her brother-in-law looked at her seriously, and her sister declared she read too fast, and never put the right emphasis in the right place.

My mother and I were delighted to go to bed, for we were tired out.

CHAPTER V.

THE day Lady Arabella's amateur concert was to take place proved very hot. Mamma scandalised Aunt Jane by announcing that she would take the grey bows off her evening dress and put them on a grey muslin morning one, as she could wear nothing warmer than a muslin. My aunt always wore her things exactly as Madame Julie Browne had made them : they were dogmas not to be tampered with. I often heard Aunt Jane say with marked disapproval, that you never could be sure where you would next see the bow that now was on Sophia's head ; perhaps it would be pinned to her shoes or stuck in her bonnet. The daring imagination which could make one bow do the duty of three was shocking in my aunt's eyes. I never could understand why—unless it was that she had a natural dislike to imagination in any form. My aunt wondered if Sophia would wear her night-cap at the concert, and tie a green ribbon round it and call it a bonnet.

“ A green ribbon ! My dear Aunt Jane, mamma is still in mourning.”

“In mourning!”

It was a sight to see Aunt Jane draw back her head and shake those curls. She held the strictest and blackest doctrine on the subject of mourning, and spent half her time in jet and crape. She wore black for Uncle Sherbrook's second, third, and fourth cousins.

“Aunt Jane, for whom are you in mourning?”

“Oh, don't you know? Poor John Henry Stewart,” or “Poor dear Emily Sherbrook.” Very often people she had never even seen when alive.

The last two years there had been sad mortality amongst the distant Stewarts, quite an awful slaughter of Scotch relations, so that Aunt Jane's yellow stripes were as good as new. My aunt now said she would wear this dress, as she had got it for concerts and afternoon parties. I told her yellow stripes were out of fashion, and that, besides, the top skirt wanted looping up.

“Maybe if you had two large pins, I could catch it——”

I was cut short by a “Sophy, no pinning for me!”

So Aunt Jane wore her yellow stripes without any alteration, and the bonnet to match, with the buttercups at one side, and the yellow string and the black one tied in a bow under her chin. This bonnet had also lain two years buried alive in a bandbox. I begged in vain to be allowed to alter it.

When my aunt appeared dressed for the concert, I must say she looked a very peculiar kind of zebra.

On the morning of the 23d she received a special card from Lady Arabella:—

Mr and Mrs SHERBROOK.

Lady ARABELLA SCOTT,

At home.

23d June, 5 o'clock.

The Rev. Mr Thunderbore will (*D.V.*) deliver a discourse on the Spirit of Christianity in the Turkish Harems.

Please bring your Bible and your purse.

Aunt Jane was in wonderful spirits. The truth is, she enjoyed the novelty of a little amusement, as she hardly ever allowed herself any. But she was not aware of this. On the contrary, I heard her say she would give away her ticket if she had any one to give it to. She imagined that she went to the concert and tea-party solely as a "means under Providence" for the furtherance of a good work. The sense of performing a duty cheerfully added much to her pleasure and a little to her pomposity. I might indeed say, if I spoke her own strange language, that she girded on her yellow stripes rejoicing in spirit. She went on her way with Uncle Sherbrook nearly an hour too soon.

We started so as to be in time for the first song. Mamma did not wear her pinned-up skirts and bows with her sister's light heart. She was a really shy woman, and she looked forward nervously to meeting Denis.

"If this Miss Tutterton sings, he is sure to be there," she would repeat; "and it will be so awkward, Sophy."

I assured her there could be no awkwardness where Denis was concerned, as he never felt awkward in his life. And what I said turned out to be even more exactly true than I had expected.

Denis was the very first person we saw at Lady Arabella's. He happened to be standing in the small outer boudoir, which led into the drawing-room, where the concert was to take place. He met us as if he had seen us yesterday. "How do, Sophy? Got a chignon? Bought it? Haw!" He spoke in a voice which sounded new to my ears. "Aunt Sophia got a chignon too? Asked all the ladies since came home if they've got a chignon—quite the thing! Haw! no chignons out in Canada. Coming out next mail, they said——" and he rattled on about Canada, rinks, tobogginning, sleighing, and Travis, whom he had met out there. "Travis was sleighing a muffin, fellows said. If Travis does not take care, there is an old governor who'll slay him. Can't marry. Furley such a screw! Won't give him a penny!" and Denis told us stories of Lord Furley's miserly tricks. He asked a great many questions. "Haw! haw! Aunt Sophia, what do you say to that?" But he never once waited for an answer. This would-be-easy slangy manner was that of a perfect stranger showing off his agreeability. It was strained and unnatural, and we were taken aback at finding a new acquaintance in an old friend.

My cousin escorted us from the smaller into the larger room, looked at our tickets, and found our places, talking all the time. "Rather think must leave you," said he. "Haw! Aunt Sophia, I . . . haw! . . . hope to look you up some day soon. Awfully busy. Height of the season. Every one in town. Montagu Square? . . . haw! . . . let me see . . . other side of Portman Square?"

"It is where it used to be when you were a boy, Denis," said my mother; but my cousin was gone.

We had very good seats for hearing and seeing, though rather too near the pianoforte. I spied Aunt Jane's buttercups in the distance. The Sherbrooks were facing the dais, and sat in the same row as the Clarckes. I saw two of the girls—Fanny and Louisa—and their mother, and I perceived Mr David Scott standing close by. Our seats were extra chairs arranged along the upper sides of the room, cross-corners to the rows of chairs in front of the performers. I think they were after-thoughts of Lady Arabella's charity. As there were twelve altogether, six at one side of the room and six at the other, I calculated they must have brought in ten guineas to the Turkish petticoats—ten, not twelve, for the armchair at the end of each row was reserved for the mother of one prima-donna. I had Mrs Elmer-Elmer next me. In a few minutes Lady Tutterton appeared leaning on Denis, and was enthroned by him in the armchair opposite Mrs Elmer-Elmer's. The two mothers bowed the one to the other with an exaggeration of politeness.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer seemed glad to see us, though our previous acquaintance was slight. Then she could talk to me, and could not have talked to a perfect stranger; and Mrs Elmer-Elmer was a great talker, —she slipped on from one sentence to another, using many French words, and a sprinkling of Italian ones such as *fioretture*, *crescendo*, *piano*. She spoke chiefly of her daughter's great musical genius, and of the compliments paid her by Prince Teck. She told me how jealous other ladies were of "dear Ermyntrude's" high notes, and how Signor Screecini, the celebrated singing-master, praised her magnificent voice. Mrs Elmer-Elmer was essentially a musical mother, and made the great mistake of dressing herself and her daughter operatically. She was rather silly, not exactly ill-natured, but a great gossip, and singularly transparent. She betrayed to all the world how glad she was to have had the Tecks at her house. She showed herself piqued when people forgot to add the second *Elmer* to her name. She was Mrs Elmer-Elmer. I have since found that to most people she is not herself at all, but only the mother of *that Miss Elmer who sings*. But I thoroughly realised Mrs Elmer-Elmer's individuality, and shall ever consider her to be her own peculiar self, and nobody else, or their mother or daughter either. Mrs Elmer-Elmer (I take a pleasure in repeating this name)—Mrs Elmer-Elmer's running conversation was interrupted by the Pasha's arrival. Now the Pasha was certainly himself, a regular Turk, and no mistake, for he wore his red fez. Lady Arabella leant upon

his arm. I wondered her ladyship did not take this opportunity of impressing Moustapha Koustapha Bey with the elegant simplicity of the black silk petticoat. I must confess I was surprised to see her wearing a sage-green dress with salmon-coloured trimmings. I hoped his Highness would not fall in love with Lady Arabella, for it would be a sad pity were he to introduce into Turkey, a head-dress of such barbarous taste: feathers stuck out of the erection, and it looked as if it might have been made for a Pottawottamee squaw. Altogether, what a figure Lady Arabella was! She reminded me of one of those ancient missals illuminated on parchment. There was sound doctrine in her (perhaps), and a good deal of paint. The night of the Clarckes' ball, I had felt sure she wore a false front, but I only suspected the rouge. By daylight this suspicion became a certainty.

When Lady Arabella and her Pasha had taken their places in the front row, facing the piano and raised dais, a leaf of the screen which hid the end of the room was pushed aside, and two gentlemen came forward on the platform, each holding a roll of music in a gloved hand. We looked at our programme, and saw it was an Italian duet, to be sung by the Baron von Klammerhammer and Viscount Studhorsey. "Which is the Baron?" I asked Mrs Elmer-Elmer. She told me he was the little fat old gentleman with the very bald head. "Rather *passé*, I fear," said she. "Lord Studhorsey, you have heard him? He is one of our *nouveautés*, a *débutant*. He sings quite charm-

ingly. The other night, at my house, he and Ermyntrude sang their great *duo*, you know." Mrs Elmer-Elmer hummed an air, "'*Il cuor mi batte perfido, il cuor mi trema perfida.*' A sweet——"

Miss Tutterton struck the first chord on the piano. It was she who played the accompaniment to this duet. The Baron's voice certainly had passed its prime: the lower notes were not so bad, but the upper ones were gone. When Herr von Klammerhammer took a high note, he stood on his tiptoes and raised his eyebrows and his eye-glass at the same time. I think it was with the eye-glass that he caught his upper D; he barely touched it. Lord Studhorsey, a consumptive, dark-moustachioed tenor, had nothing dashing about him but his name. The duet was well received.

"So kind of the Baron!"

"Sweet voice, Lord Studhorsey's!"

I observed to the musical mother beside me that Miss Tutterton seemed to accompany well.

"When she does accompany," said Mrs Elmer-Elmer; "generally it is the affrighted singers who have to accompany her. She keeps them in great order, I can tell you. You know what they call her?"

"No."

"The Drill-sergeant."

"The Drill-sergeant!" I was indeed amazed. "She is not like a drill-sergeant, except . . . except perhaps," I could not help adding, "when she stares through her eye-glass."

"Exactly!" said Mrs Elmer-Elmer.

We next had a trio from Miss Tutterton, the Baron, and his small lordship, with Madame Scratchowitz, that talented Pole, at the piano. The Drill-sergeant led in style, and the trio was a decided success. Had I not listened, I could yet have told this by the gracious smiles of the mother opposite. Her rival next me whispered something about *fioretture* not in time. Still she applauded, informing me that she made a point of applauding any song in which Miss Tutterton took a part.

"People say such things! They are so jealous themselves, you know."

Then came another trio, the performers being Miss Ermyntrude Elmer-Elmer, the Herr, and the Viscount. The soprano held a high note for several bars, while the bass rang the changes on "*Vecchio genitor*" and the tenor repeated "*Amor del mio cuor-or-or.*" There was great clapping. Even the ladies clapped with three fingers of the right hand on the palm of the left. Lady Tutterton did not join in the general applause: having unfortunately dropped her programme, she was occupied in picking it up. The soprano's mamma remarked to me that dear Ermyntrude had a slight cold, and I said what I felt I was expected to say—"Your daughter is in charming voice. Quite a treat to hear her, I do assure you." Mrs Elmer-Elmer touched me on the shoulder with her fan, and whispered that Ermyntrude's solo would indeed be a treat. "Only"—she put up her finger—"hush! it is not in the programme! Lady Arabella dared not,

because of the other. Jealousy, Miss Thursley—jealousy! It is sad, too sad, people should be so jealous of my poor Ermyintrude. I cannot understand it. Jealousy, Miss Thursley, is the strangest passion of the human heart.”

While this wise mother was thus moralising, the two gentleman singers had disappeared. They had earned a rest. Miss Tutterton and Madame Scratchowitz alone remained on the dais. “The other” evidently intended giving us a solo. Mrs Elmer-Elmer did not perceive this, being quite taken up with her own admirable reflections on the human heart; so that Miss Tutterton’s first note gave her a shock, and drew from her an exclamation of amazement. She could not stifle her sudden surprise. A “Hush! hush!” was heard through the room, and Mrs Elmer-Elmer became as red as Aunt Jane in an argument. She cast indignant eyes at Lady Arabella, but her ladyship appeared quite absorbed in the charming music. The Pasha yawned: this I considered inexcusable; for the song, though perhaps a trifle too severely classical for a Turk, was tastefully sung. The rival mothers shot glances at each other.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer soon recovered her composure, and was able to join in the “sweetly prettys,” “too delightfuls,” and “brava-bravas,” with which the company around us greeted the Drill-sergeant’s *motif* in B flat. I am no judge, but I thought Miss Tutterton had very great musical talent, and you could tell in what

language she sang. To my mind, all she wanted to be a good singer was a voice; but I am told you don't want a voice nowadays, and that some of the best amateurs sing exquisitely, and are immensely admired, in fact adored, in their own set, and yet have positively no voice at all.

Aunt Jane afterwards told me she could hardly hear a note of Miss Tutterton's song where she sat. For this reason there was not much enthusiasm at the more distant end of the room. Then the audience was mixed. Miss Tutterton's own musical set, I have since been told, would have clapped whether they heard her or not.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer informed me in an audible whisper that whenever Ermyintrude sang that particular song it was encored.

Miss Tutterton stepped down from the dais, and standing by her mother's armchair, received the congratulations of Lady Arabella and other admirers. Denis appeared on the scene, and seemed to pay very pleasing compliments. He then seemed to be taking leave, and I overheard "Furley, Tattersall's." He left the room, giving us a wave of the hand as he passed.

We were now in the midst of the ten minutes' interval between the first part and the second. Ices were handed to the Pasha; he ate three, and stopped yawning. They were then taken round to the rest of the company. When you had eaten your ice, a waiter asked for a shilling. This little circumstance created

visible surprise, and recalled to our minds the fact that we were assisting at a work of charity.

My mother wondered what was coming next. She had not spoken for some time; our meeting with Denis had silenced her. We studied the programme, and found Miss Tutterton would not sing again till she took part in the grand finale, a quartett:—

<i>Luna, crudel' luna</i>	{	Miss Elmer-Elmer.
		Baron von Klammerhammer.
		Viscount Studhorsey.
		Miss Tutterton.

I observed the singers' names were placed alphabetically, even the gentlemen's. This is most unusual; but I considered the precaution a wise one, for I began to perceive that amongst musical geniuses there are firsts, but no lasts.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer in a flutter of excitement told me the time for Ermytrude's solo had now arrived. A few minutes elapsed, and then Miss Elmer-Elmer came from behind the screen and walked forwards with her eyes cast down and a blush on her cheek. She was a singularly modest and even timid-looking girl. She had very fair hair and a pretty face. The conversation ceased. The Pasha brightened suddenly. I dare say his Highness had but few fair wives. Programmes rustled. The hum of expectation died away. There was silence. A voice near us whispered, "Look at Miss Tutterton." These words were not Mrs Elmer-Elmer's

—she sat engrossed, I might say enraptured, in her daughter. The whisper vibrated in the stillness. I noticed others perceived it besides me, and more eyes than mine were turned towards the “Drill-sergeant.” She stood with her eye-glass fixed on her rival; her lips were parted: it seemed as if the whole passion of her nature, and the whole jealousy of her soul, were concentrated and cocked in one eye.

As to Lady Tutterton, she trembled with indignation. I wondered how Lady Arabella could smilingly ignore her frowns.

Miss Elmer’s was a beautiful voice—clear and high; it filled the room. She gave us an Italian *bravura* song full of difficult passages: just the thing, perhaps I should say just the trash, for a mixed audience. She ran up and down the scale, and took high notes like a Titiens or a Patti. I should say Miss Elmer had more voice than genius, while Miss Tutterton had more genius than voice. These two distinguished amateurs were so unlike, that jealousy need never have come between them.

When “dear Ermyntrude’s” wonderful *roulades* were encored, Mrs Elmer-Elmer could not conceal her enchantment. The applause intended for the daughter was instinctively acknowledged by the mother.

The encore proved too much for the Tuttertons’ nerves. The runs so enthusiastically received by the audience irritated these ladies. “Mere *sofeggi*,” escaped her ladyship’s compressed lips, and raised a snile around her. Miss Elmer’s high notes seemed to shake the poor

"Drill-sergeant's" eye-glass. She fidgeted with this glass, and put it up and put it down, and took off one glove to fix it better. Her bare hand was covered by the blushes which reddened her very forehead.

Before the run at the end of Miss Elmer-Elmer's song had quite ceased, Lady Arabella left her chair, evidently overflowing with congratulations for "my most charming soprano and her very excellent mother." To our astonishment, the Pasha was wide awake, and rose also and walked after her ladyship. His Highness said something, doubtless in French. Lady Arabella turned her back to Mrs Elmer-Elmer, and crossed the open space in front of the piano—the Pasha following. Lady Tutterton stood up; Miss Tutterton advanced. It was clear to all the company that his Highness Moustapha Koustapha Bey had requested to be introduced to Lady Tutterton and her accomplished daughter. The Pasha (dreadful old Turk!) stopped suddenly, and exclaimed, loud enough for us to hear him, "*Non, non, miladi! pas celle-ci, mais l'autre!*" intimating only too clearly which soprano he admired. Lady Arabella had misunderstood her "*marquis ture.*"

Miss Elmer-Elmer, in the act of retiring behind the screen, was stopped by our flurried hostess. The Pasha mounted the dais; and there, in the sight of all, the presentation took place like a part of the programme. The honour was undoubtedly great. The prima-donna received it quietly enough: still the fine speeches of the Turk were pleasant. Mrs Elmer-Elmer must have considered the Pasha an admirable judge

of Italian music, or she would not have shown such delighted elation at the compliments his Highness paid her daughter. As to the Tuttertons, they betrayed a pique which could only have sprung from envy at not being admired by so distinguished a *macstro*.

I heard Moustapha Koustapha beg Miss Elmer-Elmer for another song. She tried to refuse. The Pasha appealed to Lady Arabella, and her ladyship's perplexity amused me. She looked nervously at the Tuttertons. Miss Elmer's eyes followed hers. The two ladies appeared to understand each other, and it seemed most unlikely the Pasha would gain his point. He did so by tapping on the piano and announcing, as he turned towards the audience, that "*Mademoiselle Elmer veut bien avoir la complaisance de nous chanter un solo.*" This was received with great applause, and the unwilling favourite was obliged to take her seat at the piano. She sang an Irish melody to her own accompaniment.

In the middle of her song the Tuttertons got up and left the room. They walked in front of the dais, right between the singer and the audience. Miss Elmer nearly broke down. Every one stared, turned round, and whispered. Lady Tutterton went first; the "Drill-sergeant" followed at sufficient distance to allow her mother's long skirt its full swing. The indignant, insulted ladies rustled as they moved. Truly there was a magnificent dignity about them, which might have been sublime had it not been ridiculous. Their departure caused a sensation. Lady Arabella almost

changed colour, notwithstanding her rouge. Even Mrs Elmer-Elmer's attention was drawn away from her daughter's voice ; she whispered to me, " My Lady Tuttut ! so like her ! "

When Miss Elmer left the piano, the Baron von Klammerhammer and Madame Scratchowitz took her place. This Pole, half amateur, half artist, was said to be a countess in disguise, and the Emperor of Russia's personal enemy. Perhaps the Czar dislikes long sonatas. Madame Scratchowitz and the Baron (indefatigable genius !) played an endless sonata by Moscheles. It is the only sonata by that composer I have ever heard, and I must say it bored me. This dreary work seemed to be written by a learned musician in search of an idea which he never found. Lady Arabella smiled, and nodded, and kept time with the music all through the five movements ; and when at last—at long last—the sonata ended, her ladyship cried aloud, " How charmingly Madame Scratchowitz and the Baron have rendered the spirit of the great composer ! " The Pasha, to whom this remark was addressed, had unfortunately fallen asleep. Lady Arabella looked annoyed. She sent a servant for the ices ; on a sign from his mistress the footman rattled the tray. His Highness did not awake till the third rattle ; perhaps he dreamt the first two were learned variations in the sonata.

The quartett, "*Luna, crudel' luna*," could not be given without Miss Tutterton, so Lord Studhorsey and Miss Elmer-Elmer sang a duet instead—" *Diva che*

tradisce." A trio was not attempted, because it was well known the Baron von Klammerhammer never could catch his high notes with his tiptoes and his eye-glass unless he had practised the thing beforehand. Lady Arabella put on her heavy gold spectacles, and herself volunteered to accompany the duet. Every one considered this "too delightful! Lady Arabella! Her own self! Really this is too kind!" And so it was; but I could not help thinking it would have been still kinder to the singers had Lady Arabella remained quietly beside her Pasha. She played many wrong notes. Lord Studhorsey became nervous and lost his place. Miss Elmer-Elmer's great shake was spoilt by an accompaniment in a false key. Her mother touched me on the shoulder and threw up her eyes.

Strange to say, this fiasco elicited enthusiastic applause. Lady Arabella wished for an encore. Miss Elmer and Lord Studhorsey pleaded exhaustion and loss of voice. We could hear the little controversy from where we sat. The audience did not encore; on the contrary, many people stood up as if anxious to leave. Lady Arabella was suffering from a peculiar kind of sore throat, or I am sure she would have sung herself. She was at length persuaded to shut up her music and step down from the piano. The Pasha awaited her. His Highness was introduced to Madame Scratchowitz and Mrs Elmer-Elmer (delightful moment!) Then the two distinguished patrons of an admirable charity left the room arm in arm, accom-

panied by the Polish countess and Mrs Elmer-Elmer and her daughter. The Baron followed with the sonata under his arm. Lord Studhorsey carried a roll of loose music.

The 'Morning Post,' in an interesting paragraph next day, said that on the conclusion of this most successful concert, Lady Arabella Scott entertained at afternoon tea his Highness Moustapha Koustapha Bey Pasha, cousin of the Sultan, the distinguished amateur performers, and a select circle. The Rev. Mr Thunderbore gave a lucid discourse on the Spirit of Christianity in the Turkish Harems.

It was late when the Sherbrooks came home. Aunt Jane was pleased with the concert and edified by the tea-party. She was amazed to find there were so many humble-minded, self-denying, admirable Christians in Turkey. The Rev. Mr Thunderbore had wellnigh convinced my aunt there were no Moham-medans left in the Sultan's dominions. I asked if the Pasha showed any surprise at what he heard, but was told the Pasha went away before the Christian address. The Elmer-Elmers, Madame Scratchowitz, the Baron, and Lord Studhorsey, had also left at the same time. Aunt Jane informed us the funds of the charity did not suffer from their early departure, as Lady Arabella, by Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's advice, had told Mr Thunderbore to make his collection first and his speech afterwards.

My mother and I were indeed surprised by the many entirely new facts about the Turks' spiritual

natures which Aunt Jane had picked up at the afternoon tea. I said so to my aunt. She was much pleased, and hoped I too had learnt some new fact that day. I answered that I had. "Yes, Aunt Jane, I have learnt there exists a hatred even stronger than that of truly pious people for all piety but their own, and this strongest passion is the hatred one musical genius feels towards another ; it extends even to two generations of them that play or sing."

CHAPTER VI.

WE all happened to be out one afternoon a few days after Lady Arabella's concert. Upon our return, there was a card lying on the hall table, which gave quite a shock to Aunt Jane's system, and even scandalised my mother. It was Denis's card, with Miss Tutterton's name written just under his own printed one. This new way of announcing an engagement was cordially condemned: my mother hated anything fast, and Aunt Jane spoke many words in season about the degenerate ways of modern society.

When Uncle Sherbrook came in and was shown the card (with due explanation), he, too, almost joined in the outcry. He did not say much, but he did not differ from what was said.

As I listened to them all, I thought a new sin was born into the world; no old-established sin could be half so shocking. I have often remarked how infinitely more shocking a new sin, however tiny, is, than an old one—and doubtless because it shows the devil is still inventing.

Scandalised as Aunt Jane might be at the manner

of Miss Tutterton's visit, she nevertheless thought we ought immediately to return her call. Now, mamma and Aunt Jane held different views on the subject of visiting. My aunt loved to find her friends at home, and to pitch her tent under their roof, like a nomad who has at last found rest for the sole of her foot. My mother, on the contrary, chose a very fine day, and called just at the hour she knew people went out driving. Visits would hang over her like black clouds. She was impatient by nature, and longed to kill off her friends quickly.

We had three wet days, which were a sad trial to her.

"Now, Sophia," said Aunt Jane each day, "if I were you I should return Miss Tutterton's visit, and call on Lady Arabella. You would have a chance of finding them at home."

"It is too soon, Jane—too soon."

But when the sun came out again, mamma declared she had already delayed far too long in paying those visits.

"I have told you so over and over again, Sophia."

"And you were right, Jane."

"Yes, Sophia, I was right ; I know I was."

My aunt felt so pleased at her infallibility being recognised, that she announced her intention, much to our disgust, of accompanying us on a visiting tour that very afternoon. She generally went upon her campaigns alone with Uncle Sherbrook. They suited each other. We looked forward unhappily to the slow

tortures awaiting us, and my mother ordered a fly, with a failing heart, though it was a fine day, and there were hopes our friends would not be at home.

People thought it strange the Sherbrooks never would bring up their own carriage for the season to London, and wondered their horses did not eat themselves to death in the country. I expect, when my uncle and aunt were away, Robert Jones, the coachman, mixed a little sound doctrine, or something else, with the pure oats, and thus saved their lives. Aunt Jane would not for the world that Robert Jones came to London and associated with other grooms and coachmen. "The grooms of a great metropolis? The most godless of men! For they are corrupted on race-courses, and lead a life of undisguised depravity, ignoring too often the very elements of religion." So Robert Jones stayed at Sherbrook, and was reported to spend his spare time in teaching the Church Catechism to the stable-boy. An admirable and pious coachman is an edifying piece of creation, though he may drive slowly; but an admirable and pious lady's-maid is the most perfect work of . . . Satan. Aunt Jane kept a model household.

I must say I myself used to think it would be pleasanter for my aunt to drive about comfortably in her own carriage than in a melancholy one-horse fly. Besides, to my mind, a little depravity would have done Robert no harm. It might have enlivened him, and the stable-boy could have learnt the Catechism at the Sunday-school. Most decidedly, I should have

risked Robert's morals in the great metropolis! Then I hated shut-up flies, especially when I sat with my back to the horse. I should greatly have preferred driving in my coffin with the lid off. The fly is the coffin with the lid on.

Aunt Jane was afraid of draughts, so we kept the windows up that afternoon, and jogged on slowly as if to the grave. My mother looked like a mute. My aunt was more lively, and wore the yellow stripes, and the bonnet to match.

We snailed first to the Clarks. The tedious, despairing motion of a creeping carriage is like that of a snail who goes through life crawling—crawling with his shell behind him. The Clarks were out. Aunt Jane discussed the family as we snailed towards Lady Arabella's house. She wondered the Miss Clarks had not better manners, for they had been most sensibly brought up, and Lady Clarke had intrusted their education to a well-informed Christian lady of a certain age, and yet my aunt was deeply grieved to say they were very fast. The two eldest were loud in their manners, and Louisa, the youngest, had a reprehensible flirting something about her—a “je ne sais quoi.” Aunt Jane felt shocked whenever Louisa spoke to Mr Scott. ^{she} My aunt had sat next the Clarks at Lady Arabella's concert.

The pretty, happy face I had seen at the ball, rose up before me, and I awoke from the half-sea-sick torpor which invariably overcomes me when I am driving backwards in a coffin with the lid on. I fired up, and

took Louisa's part. My aunt had shifted her ground. She was now finding fault with Mr Scott's manners. I defended him also. Aunt Jane expressed surprise: she observed I was so placed at the concert that I could not possibly know anything of Mr Scott's demeanour, or of Louisa Clarcke's either. This was true. Had Aunt Jane stopped when she made this remark, I should have been ignobly silenced; but she diverged to flirting in general. She spoke of the sin with her accustomed severity. She declared no right-feeling, truly Christian gentleman ever flirted with the lady he admired; or if he did, it was the lady's own fault.

"Your uncle *never* flirted with me!"

My aunt shook her curls; the bonnet and the butter-cups shook also.

"Your uncle *never* flirted with me!"

This was said with an air of perfect, perfect propriety!

I sat opposite my aunt, so the ludicrous expression of her countenance could not escape me. It proved too much for my gravity. I burst into a fit of laughter. My mother laughed with me. Aunt Jane could not imagine what amused us. She seemed to consider my laughter to be the outward sign of inward depravity—the bubbling of the hidden well of vanity and of the waters of vice.

"Sophia, you encourage the child," said she solemnly, in nowise affected by our merriment; "you encourage the child, while it ought to be your duty to impress

her with the sad and serious evils flirting invariably . . .”

I discovered the carriage was standing still. I don't think we had moved for a minute, but no wonder we did not perceive the snailing had come to an end. I had my hand on the door, delighted to hop out, ring the bell, and skip the sermon. Aunt Jane stopped me.

“Sophy,” she said, “you had better recover some composure and dignity of manner before you offer yourself to the observant gaze of footmen.”

So Aunt Jane got out of the carriage herself, and walked up the steps slowly, and rang the bell beside Lady Arabella's hall-door. It is a pity there was no one in the street to see her; for, as Uncle Sherbrook loves to say, little things are not little things if they are done like great ones.

My mother looked at her watch, and found it was still early. She began to fear the Tuttertons would be at home; dread of the eye-glass quite sobered her. I suggested a visit to the Elmer-Elmers. We had not left a card there this season. Mamma jumped at the idea, and begged me not to lose a moment in telling the coachman to drive there next.

“And tell him he is to go there first, and he is not to follow any directions Mrs Sherbrook may give him.”

I put my head out of the window (not at the pavement side), and gave mamma's order to the drowsy old fly-driver. He did not grasp the order until I had repeated it three times. I was afraid Aunt Jane might return while I was merely a skirt in the car-

riage and a body outside. But she still stood, the picture of dignity, at Lady Arabella's door. The black-coated butler stood opposite in the hall, a pendant picture of influential dignity.

"Aunt Jane," I said, "is inquiring when the King of the Cannibal Islands is going to eat his missionary. Lady Arabella is sure to know."

When at last my aunt's flounces before, and straight stripes behind, and black lace shawl, were resettled in the carriage, we perceived that our dear relation was seriously upset. Something must have happened which touched her personal feelings more than a poor white eaten, or going to be eaten, by the blacks.

Now I felt convinced by this time that the only chance there is of surviving a drive in a coffin, lies in keeping the mind excited or amused. So in hopes of an *argument*, or a ludicrous little word in season, I began wondering if Lady Arabella were really not at home. I had fixed on the irritated nerve.

"*Not at home* means in London," said Aunt Jane, "that you are not in the house; and in the country it means that you are neither in the house, nor in the garden, nor yet walking on the front or on the back avenue: but *not at home* never can mean you are in the house, but engaged, or waiting for your carriage."

"Yet it does mean that, Aunt Jane."

"Then it is a fib! It is more—it is a lie, child; and liars have their place in the burning lake. It is an invention of Satan!"

"And the very best thing Satan ever invented!"

cried I; "for it enables one to get rid of all the tiresome people!"

This was the beginning of an enlivening tiff between my aunt and me.

It seems, when Aunt Jane asked for Lady Arabella, the butler said, "Not at home. Her ladyship is going out driving." This answer shocked my aunt, for she said, "Lady Arabella is not a woman of the world who would authorise her servants to deviate from the truth."

This is a short account plucked from the very long and branching one given us by Aunt Jane. My aunt announced her serious intention of writing to Lady Arabella. "Her servants follow the practice so common in ungodly households; and by saying not at home when you are at home, they systematically disregard the sacredness of truth. Lady Arabella would be deeply grieved, and I will write and tell her."

"Jane," said my mother, "remember Lady Arabella's concert is over, so she may not be as anxious to receive her friends now, as she was earlier in the season. She has no more tickets to dispose of."

Our arrival at the Elmers' house put an end to the "argument," just as we had a right to expect a reviving explosion from Aunt Jane.

Astonishment of my aunt! "This is not the Tuttertons'! Why, we are at the Elmer-Elmers'!" Explanations from my mother.

"Mrs Elmer-Elmer is at home, miss."

"You need not mind coming in, Jane, unless you

like," says my mother. But Aunt Jane does like to come in.

We are shown up-stairs, into a boudoir next the great music-room. Miss Ermytrude Elmer-Elmer can be heard practising *roulades*. In comes Mrs Elmer-Elmer: good-natured, kindly in her manners; frightful in her dress. Her caps were turbans, and she loved glass beads. She was not aware that she dressed peculiarly; indeed she was for ever giving my mother her milliner's direction in Paris—Madame Josephine, Place de l'Opéra, numéro 20. I remember it as that of a woman to be avoided.

We were not seated before Aunt Jane had mentioned the concert. Mrs Elmer-Elmer seized the glorious opportunity with eager delight, and we had the secret history of the two solos. "Lady Arabella might have told Ermytrude; *she* would not have been jealous. But the Drill-sergeant! you see she could not trust the Drill-sergeant!"

Aunt Jane did not know whom the Drill-sergeant possibly could be. Mrs Elmer-Elmer explained at some length what I already knew—that the Drill-sergeant meant Miss Tutterton. We had the why and the wherefore of this, it would appear, not quite undeserved nickname.

Aunt Jane remarked that jealousy was an all-devouring flame burning up the heart of man. Mrs Elmer-Elmer assented to this in a reverent manner. I am sure she thought Aunt Jane had quoted a verse from the Bible. My aunt is at times so eminently

Scriptural in her language, that it would require an archbishop to decide if her texts are Gospel or not.

"Very true, Mrs Sherbrook—very true. Jealousy burneth man's heart, and woman's also. Signor Screecini used to say (he was Ermyntrode's singing-master, but he never spoke Italian to her, as she only understands it when she sings)—he said to her, 'Madoiselle, souvenez-vous que l'alouette n'aime point la fauvette.'"

"Translate that, Sophy," whispered my aunt.

"One lady pecks another," said I.

"This saying of Signor Scree—of your daughter's singing-master," remarked Aunt Jane, "is no doubt one of the popular sayings of Italy, and, like the proverbs so common in Spain, and indeed like most, if not all, the wisdom of the West, I dare say it is clearly traceable to the East, for the lost tribes of Israel spread——"

But Mrs Elmer-Elmer was a match for Aunt Jane. She had easy transitions of her own—twists and turns in a maze where there is only one door out. The one topic Mrs Elmer cared to discuss was amateur singers and their music. She dismissed the lost tribes of Israel with a "Most interesting, Mrs Sherbrook!—most interesting! The Israelites were a wonderful people."

"And undoubtedly inspired," put in my aunt.

"Inspired and wonderful! but believe me, Mrs Sherbrook, there is no world so wonderful as the musical world! The stories I could tell you. . . ." And she did tell us stories: little huffy bickerings

of an amateur chorus; war declared between rival mothers; great hatreds of great sopranos—"dear Ermyntrude is quite devoid of such feelings!"—spiteful tricks of small tenors, for it would seem the singing man is often a meaner bird than the singing woman. All this was quite new to me, and amusing, and I was delighted we had slipped away from the Israelites and the wisdom of the West. Oh that 'Wisdom of the West and Ethics of the East'! Oft-quoted book! its very name bored me.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer continued to talk on with much fluency, quite undisturbed by Aunt Jane's irrelevant remarks. She did not silence her; but however digressive my aunt's observations might be, Mrs Elmer made stepping-stones of them, and forded the stream in the direction she wished to go. I think she did this instinctively, without reflecting.

I noticed the piano had stopped. Miss Ermyntrude came into the room. I was glad to see her, for I thought my poor mother would now have some one to talk to. Mamma never could get in a word with Aunt Jane, unless she talked at the same time as her sister. This she considered bad manners; so the dear creature was buried alive when she went visiting with my aunt. She sat silent on a chair, like an ornamental mummy.

Miss Ermyntrude Elmer-Elmer entered just as her mother was dilating on the most favourite part of her favourite topic—the mad jealousy all the musical mothers in London betrayed of dear Ermyntrude.

"You saw Lady Tutterton?—~~my~~ Lady Tuttut, as they call her!—you saw her at Lady Arabella's, flounce out of the room, and the Drill-sergeant after her? The Chevalier de Clairon once said to me, when the Tuttertons positively walked over Ermyntrode at a *soirée musicale*, '*Madame Elmer-Elmer regardez un peu! Le caporal suit le tambour-major! Malbrook s'en va-t-en guerre! Mon Dieu! c'est beau à voir!*' The Chevalier is an *attaché* to the French embassy."

"*Mong Dieu!*" repeated Aunt Jane in a low voice of horror; "how shocking! The Chevalier is a Papist, I fear."

"No, he is a baritone!" cried Mrs Elmer, evidently not realising what Aunt Jane said. "French baritones are sometimes a little hard, but he is a charming singer. The Chevalier won't sing with Miss Tutterton. He only sings with Ermyntrode."

"Then," said I, "Miss Tutterton has to content herself with the Baron von Klammerhammer and Lord Studhorsey."

"When she can get them, *ma petite!*" exclaimed Mrs Elmer, triumphantly. "Lord Studhorsey greatly prefers singing with Ermyntrode. It is true the Baron—poor man!—sings with whoever will have him;—*passé!* decidedly *passé!*"

Mrs Elmer-Elmer then explained to us that hardly any one worth hearing sings with any one else. Lord George Warbattle likes to sing his Spanish solo, though no one cares to listen to a bass. He hates singing second to Lord Studhorsey. Lord Studhorsey

cannot bear the rival tenor, Mr Reginald Meltem ; and Miss Tutterton declares Mr Meltem has no method, though there are ladies who admire his voice. I began to consider a duet the direct result of a miracle.

"Method is everything with Miss Tutterton," continued Mrs Elmer-Elmer ; "and no wonder she thinks more of method than of voice ! Miss Tutterton is well taught, my dear Mrs Sherbrook—very well taught. Positively no natural organ ! Now Mr Reginald Meltem is all voice ; great sentiment, I do assure you ! I . . ." dropping her voice—"I cannot say I quite like to hear him sing '*t'amo*' with my daughter. Lord Studhorsey has a better ear for time."

I looked at Miss Ermytrude to see if she enjoyed the conversation of her mother. I could not see her face, for her head was turned away. She had risen, saying, "There is a draught, Mrs Thursley," and had beckoned mamma to a chair at the other side of the room.

So far, my mother had shown unnatural patience ; but when she got up at Miss Elmer's request, she seemed to think the opportunity of giving Aunt Jane a hint to say good-bye was not to be lost. "Really, Mrs Elmer-Elmer," she said—"now really, I cannot sit down again. We have paid you a visitation. Come, Jane, we have——" Aunt Jane finished her sentence—"another visit to pay to the Lady Tutterton you have been speaking of, Mrs Elmer-Elmer, because her daughter is engaged to my nephew."

The musical mother started up with unfeigned surprise.

"Lady Tutterton! and you never told me, Mrs Sherbrook! and the way I have talked! Excuse me, excuse me! And the Drill . . . A thousand pardons! Miss Tutterton is engaged to your nephew! Ermyntrude! Ermyntrude! Miss Tutterton is going to be married!"

"To be married?" repeated Miss Elmer, in incredulous amazement.

"Yes, to be married," said Aunt Jane, "and to my nephew, Denis Rigardy-Wrenstone." My aunt said this with that air of satisfaction which she invariably assumes when she announces a wedding, even if she does not approve of the match. Aunt Jane likes telling any piece of news.

"Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, how you do astonish me! A good match, I suppose?" inquired Mrs Elmer, eagerly.

"In a worldly point of view, it is a good one," replied my aunt: the heavenly point of view was a matter of mental reservation. "About five thousand a-year," continued Aunt Jane; "and indeed, if he would take Edward's advice——"

"Five thousand a-year, Ermyntrude! No profession, I suppose? Is he handsome, Mrs Sherbrook?"

"There is a levity," sighed Aunt Jane, "and a carnal——"

"Oh, but, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, has he a fine figure and a good-looking face? Miss Thursley, you will know—is he handsome?"

"Decidedly," I said.

"Wonderful, I declare, Ermyntrude—wonderful!"

Miss Elmer said nothing. She had recovered from

her first surprise. She is a sweet, amiable creature, and would not say an unkind word of any one. Her silence showed me that the most charitable act one amateur singer can do towards another, is to hold her tongue when the rival soprano's name is mentioned.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mrs Thursley," exclaimed Mrs Elmer, politely ; "charming niece — charming niece, Mrs Thursley !"

My mother muttered something, in which "Thank you" and "Good-bye" were mixed up together. She shook hands and went down-stairs.

Aunt Jane, as usual, loitered behind at the drawing-room door. She never could take leave in one farewell. For a wonder, I lingered with her. I am generally greatly bored by long visits ; yet I was in no hurry to go, for the musical mother had amused me. My curiosity was excited as I heard Mrs Elmer-Elmer say, "Never for a moment did I guess such a thing ; and I don't know what I might not have said, Mrs Sherbrook. I was on the very point of telling you——"

"Oh, what, Mrs Elmer-Elmer ?" I cried. "Was it about Lady Tutterton ? Don't mind ; do tell the story. I am sure it is delightful."

So with a little pressing (it did not require much !) Mrs Elmer gave us a description of the way Miss Tutterton stood up at the Warbattles' *at home*, and "interpreted — that is the correct word, Mrs Sherbrook — interpreted classical music for the space of ten minutes. You would have thought they were twenty,

Miss Thursley. She has positively no organ! There is method, if you like—and too much of it, Mrs Sherbrook, for my taste. When Miss Tutterton finished her song—her interpretation, I mean—up gets Miss Julia Horston. They call her Hoarsetone—no body in her voice! Now what do you think happened?"

Aunt Jane was going to guess, but Mrs Elmer continued her story: "Sir Horace Tutterton (Sir Hoighty-Toighty, they call *him*), he is as blind as a bat—just like his daughter! He put up his eye-glass, and I suppose he stuck it in the wrong eye, for he said to Lady Tutterton, 'That is Miss Elmer-Elmer. She is going to sing.' 'Oh!' cries my lady, 'then I'll be off.' And she is in such a fuss, she does not even look to see who it is. Amelia Meltem was sitting right behind her, and heard her say, 'Then I'll be off;,' and Amelia told Ermyntrude. But it seems, just as Tuttut was leaving her seat, Sir Hoighty-Toighty put up his eye-glass, and this time in the right eye. 'Oh no, it is not she,' he says; 'it is only Miss Horston.' So my lady sat down, and there she stayed till Ermyntrude really did begin her *Taci taci cattivo cuore*—a sweet thing; and then Tuttut walked off in the middle of the *diminuendo*, and spoilt the whole effect."

I was glad I had waited behind for this little story. Any tale which one musical mother tells of another is worth listening to, for it is told with such lively delight.

My mother and I sat silent in our coffin as we went snailing towards the Tuttertons' house in Lowndes

Square. Aunt Jane talked on as usual. I just put in a "yes! ah! oh! indeed!" every now and then, for the sake of good manners, but I did not listen to her. At last my mother did speak. She looked nervously at Aunt Jane, then gazed out of the window, cleaned the glass with the window-strap, and began, "Jane——"

"Really, Sophia, I can't hear you if you turn away your head and whisper."

"Jane—I—I think it is too late to go to the Tuttertons' this evening. We can go any other day."

"Too late, Sophia? Why, it is just the right time to find them at home, and I am particularly anxious to meet Lady Tutterton."

"But you will not ask for her, Jane?" cried my mother.

"I will, Sophia. Edward and I know what good manners are, and possibly Lady Tutterton does not."

Aunt Jane told us she and "Edward" agreed in thinking Lady Tutterton ought to have accompanied her daughter and Denis on their visit; her card, at least, should have been left by Miss Tutterton.

I must say the Infallibles were right. "If Lady Tutterton," continued my aunt, sublimely—"if Lady Tutterton does not know the rules of society, I will teach them to her."

My mother was overawed by Aunt Jane, and gave up the discussion as hopeless. I cannot say she resigned herself to the Tuttertons and fate. She was no more resigned than the nervous beings are resigned

who fidget in a dentist's waiting-room. Mamma's discomfort was rather amusing to behold. I smiled, and yet I pitied her.

Aunt Jane's tongue had the carriage all to itself till we drew up at the Tuttertons' hall-door. When my aunt saw we had arrived, she turned to my mother, and said, with the air of a person who thinks herself clever and satirical, "You need not come in unless you wish, Sophia"—thus throwing back like a shuttlecock the words mamma had said to her at the Elmers' door. Aunt Jane would act the part of footman in her own dignified person. I fancy she was not quite certain, whether she might trust me to ask if the Tuttertons really were at home. An unsound imagination like Sophy's she would consider up to any sly trick.

My aunt beckoned to us to leave our coffin and come in. She herself walked into the hall slowly and demurely, as a lady of her importance should. Her back was turned. I had my foot on the carriage-step. A sudden impulse seized me: "Shall we leave her and drive home?" A moment's hesitation, and then: "Yes, yes," cries my mother; "and quickly, Sophy—quickly!"

As we turned into the Park, I saw it was just six by the clock. To our dismay we found a great crowd of carriages. A mounted policeman became very angry with our puzzle-headed coachman. Our fly was not allowed to cross towards the naked Achilles. On the contrary, we were ordered into a line of carriages, and forced to go in the direction of Albert Gate. Our

feelings were not pleasant. We should be blocked in the carriage-jam for the next hour! Aunt Jane's visit would be finished; she would be kept waiting for the fly. We began to repent. But our repentance was soon put an end to by the unlooked-for intelligence of our driver. A quickly trotting policeman rode down the ranks, and the Princess of Wales drove after him. Our coachman turned round behind her Royal Highness's landau; and thus, completely protected from the excitable keeper of the peace, we managed to cut into the carriages at the opposite side of the road. A brougham followed our example. Just as the horse turned in behind us, there came a block down the rank. Everything stood still; so the brougham itself remained jutting out into the policeman's and Princess's highway. When the Royal carriage had passed Apsley Gate, up cantered the head-constable. The row of carriages outside ours began to move again. The outraged official stopped the latter end of that row. He ordered our carriage to cross into the empty space, and the brougham took our place in the inner line.

There were a great many riders at the end of Rotten Row. Now as we had no Aunt Jane with us, I kept down the window at my side of the coffin, and amused myself by looking out. I sat next the riders. I looked for the Clarckes, and thought perhaps I might see Louisa and Mr Scott again, and I wondered if Louisa flirted on horseback. There was time enough for wondering at my ease. We would drive about a yard, and then come to a stop; and then move again, and stop

again; and so on, step by step, and stop by stop. Ladies who have riding admirers attached to their carriage-side, may perhaps spend a pleasant twenty minutes while stepping and stopping at the end of Rotten Row, but I found it dull work. There was a carriage drawn up by the Row, out of the drive. As we approached it, I noticed, from behind, that the coachman wore a curly white wig, and the footman powder. We pulled up beside this carriage. There was a riding admirer attached to it. My face looked out of the middle of our window, framed like Toby in a Punch-box. The grand carriage contained only one lady and two pug-dogs. The riding admirer being turned towards the lady, it so happened that we came face to face. I felt him look at me. I looked at him. I saw it was Denis. He did not seem to know me; still I felt he knew me. He did not touch his hat, nor yet turn away. He cut me dead, as the saying is. His cool composure was such, that no one but I myself could have told he was cutting me. I did not bow, not wishing to dishonour him with an acquaintance I felt he would fain ignore, in the presence of a lady of fashion and two pug-dogs. I drew back my head, and thought I had seen enough of the world for one day. My cousin's conduct wounded me. I thought him a coward—a mean worshipper of flash.

Now that I know more of the world, I am less severe. I should expect my best friend to cut me if I drove in a rattletrap between Knightsbridge and Grosvenor Gate. My friend might perhaps recognise me

by the Powder Magazine, if he or she were deeply attached to me. I instantly determined not to tell my mother we had just passed Denis, and that he had looked at me and cut me. I thought it would hurt her.

During the first ten minutes of our reprieve, my mother was a lively sinner. She evidently felt herself to be quite an independent, headstrong character. "Not a bit afraid of your Aunt Jane!"

However, the stoppages in Hyde Park cooled her spirits, like penal servitude. "I was a little nervous, Sophy. I am not generally~~y~~ shy, my dear, as you know."

Certainly I knew the contrary.

"There is something about that Miss Tutterton which makes me shy. Perhaps it is her eye-glass. And then I am sure Lady Tutterton would not have cared to make my acquaintance; and—and we might have met Denis, Sophy. He is like my own son. I must always be fond of him, no matter what he does. Still I cannot help feeling a little awkward with him. I dare say it is from not having seen him for so long. The army and the colonies change a boy into a man."

"I do not think you would have met him at the Tuttertons'," said I. I knew where he was.

"Perhaps not, Sophy, my dear—perhaps not. But your aunt. . . . Sophy, Sophy, you know what your aunt is! and the time she will stay! and the *gauche* things she says! I hope she will not be very angry,

my dear. Not that I much care! I am accustomed to her. When we were girls together, she never would let me have my own way; for if I did what I liked, I never heard the end of it. Your aunt always has been a great talker."

"I am sure she has," said I; "and it is a great pity she was not born deaf and dumb. With her natural taste for the thing, she might then have talked in moderation."

"But Edward!" exclaimed my mother, not paying attention to my remarks—"your Uncle Sherbrook! My dear Sophy, I quite forgot him! Edward is not pleasant to meet when you have offended Jane; and if Jane is kept waiting for the carriage! . . . Sophy, Sophy, what shall I do?"

I proposed we should get out at Stanhope Gate, and send the empty fly quickly back to Lowndes Square by Park Lane. We did so, and drove home in a hansom—a much pleasanter conveyance than our coffin.

My mother's repentance and nervousness overcame her on our arrival in Montagu Square. As her spirits fell, mine rose. I was still young enough to enjoy being slightly wicked. Young people are tired by the humdrum of perfection, and it is the variety of malicious sinfulness which they find attractive. None but angels can bear to be bored eternally.

My mother watched me with surprise. "Sophy, my dear, you don't seem to realise what your Aunt Jane will be like when she comes home."

"Oh, I do! perfectly! perfectly!—upper lip and all; and I will have some fun!"

?| "Fun, Sophy! fun?" My mother opened her eyes and stared at me in amazement. I tossed my head as if I had the Sherbrooks in my back hair, and wished to give them a shake. "My dear child," cried my mother, "you look quite wicked;" and then her voice changed—"What a spirit you have, Sophy!" This was said with all the admiring power of a shy mother's heart. I felt the admiration. It is really quite exciting to be admired. From the moment I thought I was considered a courageous, spirited creature, I became one.

Quick as thought, I put my mother to bed, with a deranged liver for her disease. She had to jump under the clothes having still a stocking on one leg, for Aunt Jane's voice sounded in the hall. I ran down-stairs to meet my aunt. There was anger in her eye, severity upon her upper lip. "Oh, Aunt Jane," I exclaimed, "have you any calomel?" Had I said, "Woman, hast thou a devil?" I could not have produced a more startling effect. This I had foreseen.

"Calomel, child?—calomel?"

"You may say what you like, Aunt Jane—you may say what you like," and I did not let her say anything, "Calomel! I will give no medicine but calomel!" and I called after our old butler, "John, go to the nearest chemist and buy twenty-four grains of calomel; and be quick, John—quick! No, no, Aunt Jane; you may treat Uncle Sherbrook——"

"Edward?" screamed the frightened wife. "Dreadful girl, have you dared to doctor your uncle?"

"I doctor my uncle? I meddle with his very peculiar inside? Catch me interfering with Uncle Sherbrook's liver! No, Aunt Jane, you may kill Uncle Sherbrook on a new system and your own system; I will cure my friends on the old system. I believe in castor-oil, rhubarb, and magnesia, salts and senna, bleeding, and calomel: in all cases of liver derangement, I decidedly believe in calomel. If Uncle Sherbrook were my husband, I should put blue-pill in his soup every Monday—give a weekly fillip to his constitution, and salivate him without his knowing it."

It was thus I changed the current of my aunt's thoughts and temper. I pulled the rein, and had the satisfaction of hearing her gallop away on my own highroad. She lost herself in the mazes of the new system and the old system, the water-cure and cold compress. "The doctors ruined your uncle's constitution; but I have been the means, under Providence, of restoring his health. Young people nowadays give their opinion . . ." So with the old system and the new system, young people's opinions, and Uncle Sherbrook's constitution, my aunt entirely forgot to ask for whom I wanted the calomel. Aunt Jane's mind is a world without centre of gravity. Her ideas twist and twirl in all directions, for there is nothing to keep them on their legs.

I did not take her into my mother's room until I considered her brains were sufficiently muddled to pre-

vent her feeling any astonishment at the suddenness of mamma's attack. I first argued her up each step of the stairs; and when John brought me the calomel, I ran to the invalid's bedside, declaring I would make the patient swallow every one of the twenty-four grains. Aunt Jane trotted after me with surprising agility. She caught my hands, and held them tightly. I was glad to let her hold them, though I pretended to struggle. My aunt kept calling at the top of her voice for Snipkins.

"Snipkins! Snipkins! bring the big bandage Mr Sherbrook wears round his waist, and the long one I have for my knee; and mind, do not forget the oil-silk!"

I still threatened calomel. I resisted my aunt's entreaties and demands, till the moment came when I knew her head might be trusted to turn from the honours of victory. Then I left her alone with mamma and the liver complaint. Aunt Jane had the infinite satisfaction of swathing her sister in wet bandages.

When Uncle Sherbrook missed my mother from the dinner-table, I might have had some awkward questions to answer, had not Aunt Jane immediately launched into eloquent praise of her own medical wisdom and skill. It was an inexhaustible subject.

That night, when my aunt went to bed, I took off my mother's wet bandages, and wrapped her in flannel instead. I lay awake, being excited by the events of the day,—for they were events in a life like

mine. I laughed as I thought how cleverly we had managed Aunt Jane, and escaped paying a visit to the Tuttertons in her company. I exulted in our victory; and then I dozed, and awoke again to pick up my thoughts where I had left them. They began the same; but this time, I know not how, they took another turn in ending. Instead of thinking, as before, that I had acted like a statesman, and gained a great diplomatic victory over Aunt Jane, it struck me unawares, how utterly insignificant our petty squabbles were! This notion provoked me. I wished our quarrels were important enough to upset the peace of Europe. I laughed at so ridiculous a wish; and then, while I imagined I was still awake, I fell into a nightmare, and dreamt that I wrestled, in the sight of many people, with a powerful gladiator. I alone knew that I fought with Aunt Jane. I thought she had disguised herself as a gladiator, in order to wrestle unknown with the devil. She wore pink fleshings, and a red band round her head, and looked exactly like a street-juggler. I struggled hard for victory. The voice of the crowd urging me on gave me strength, so that I overcame the gladiator, and knocked her down, and laid my foot upon her face. Now my foot was naked; I felt the cheek was hard like wood, and not like flesh at all. I knelt, and passed my hand over my enemy's face: it was neither man nor woman, but a wooden image. I heard the multitude jeer at me, crying out, "She fought with a doll, and knocked it down, and thought herself a

mighty conqueror!" I tried to run away and hide in a hole where I should not hear the mocking words; but I could not move—a horrid, powerless sensation paralysed my limbs. Louder and louder came the cry, "She thought herself a mighty conqueror!" A shout of laughter in my ear awoke me. I tried to think and to unravel this queer dream; but in thinking, I fell sound asleep.

Aunt Jane felt her patient's pulse the first thing next morning. She said the cold compress had relieved the internal inflammation; and I heard her remark to Snipkins that she now felt justified in declaring Mrs Thursley to be out of danger. She advised my mother to stay in bed for breakfast.

Mamma asked me if I thought it might be wiser for her to do so.

Before giving an answer, I ran down-stairs to see if the post had come, and I found a business letter for Uncle Sherbrook,—a "blue-buggle," as we called the new attorney's blue envelope.

"There is a blue-buggle," said I to my mother, "so you may safely venture down; for the Sherbrooks will barely inquire after your health,—they will be too much and too pleasantly occupied."

She took my advice, and I rejoice to say no evil consequences ensued.

CHAPTER VII.

THE blue-bugle contained business of solemn importance, and my aunt's mind was so engaged with great affairs, that nearly twenty-four hours elapsed before she spoke of her visit to Lowndes Square; but having once begun to speak on the subject, she had a great deal to say. We soon knew by heart all she had said, but were not so well acquainted with the Tuttertons' remarks. Miss Tutterton's manners had not fascinated her future aunt.

"She has none of the Christian charity, Sophia, that I was accustomed to in my youth, and she contradicted me flatly when I said Miss Elmer-Elmer has a very fine voice."

We perceived Aunt Jane had stumbled, as usual, upon the wrong topic, and were glad to have been absent at the time.

Where the daughter had failed to captivate, the mother had proved a charmer. Aunt Jane fell in love with that "charming, right-minded, right-thinking Lady Tutterton. For I can assure you, Sophia, she holds exactly the same views I do, and I discovered

no leaning on her part towards Ritualistic mummery."

The Sherbrooks were determined my mother should invite the Tuttertons to dinner. My uncle spoke to mamma seriously. My mother and I chose a very fine day to pay our first visit to Lowndes Square. The Tuttertons were out driving, so we left our cards, and an invitation as well.

A fortnight after my uncle had given my mother his solemn advice, Sir Horace Tutterton, Lady Tutterton, Miss Tutterton, and Denis dined with us. The Sherbrooks had preordained it should be strictly a family party, and it was one.

Denis arrived with the Tuttertons, but he did not come into the room at the same moment as they. He entered alone, with plenty of space before him, and with a sort of glory, like a crowned head. He was still much out of joint, and could hardly be said to walk. He tossed his head, and got on somehow,—I think by the help of his shirt-cuffs. Denis was particularly condescending. He patronised us all, and talked incessantly. As neither Sir Horace nor Miss Tutterton appeared to have a word to say, I was glad my cousin monopolised the conversation, though I saw Aunt Jane did not like his doing so at all.

She tried to congratulate her only brother's only son, and to hope this marriage would be a source of happiness to him and to Miss Tutterton, in this world and the next; but her nephew dexterously cut short all improvement of the occasion by alluding to some

queer marriage customs he had heard were still observed amongst the Red Indians of the Rocky Mountains. Whereupon Aunt Jane tried to hope it would not be long before the blessing of evangelical native clergymen would be asked and obtained in the marriage ceremonies of the whole world,—“from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans,” said she, “and from the Mediterranean to the Antarctic Seas.” My cousin, quickly seizing the transition, gave a voluble account of his passage across the Atlantic, of Canada, of his adventures there, of the Canadian ladies, of rinks and toboggining. He rattled on just as he had done that day at Lady Arabella’s, and said much what he had said before. Aunt Jane could not get in another word.

I almost admired the adroit, easy way Denis kept the conversation on his own tongue,—not letting Aunt Jane get under way, but seizing her transitions, and talking for us all—turning round to my mother, then back to my aunt, then getting up and addressing Miss Tutterton. I cannot say my clever cousin had what I should call very good manners; he was fidgety, and reminded me of Molière’s two *marquis*, who get up one instant and sit down the next, “*suivant leur inquiétude naturelle*.”

At dinner, my mother and Aunt Jane sat at each side of Sir Horace, Uncle Sherbrook took down Lady Tutterton, and Denis sat next his betrothed. With much ease of manner, he helped Uncle Sherbrook to do the honours of our house and table—or, to speak

more correctly, from time to time he graciously encouraged my uncle to help him.

Miss Tutterton was brusque and awkward even with my cousin, and she had a way of turning her shoulder to you when she spoke. Her conversation, or rather her "thankees," came by fits and starts, and there were dead-stops between them. Such a contrast as she was to Denis, whose tongue still raced on with fluent ease, like Mein Herr von Klam's cork leg—tooral-ooral-ooral-ooral-lido! Denis's ease of manner was of a peculiar kind, for it did not make you feel at home with him. He was still the new acquaintance who would know you to-day and cut you to-morrow.

After dinner, when we ladies went up to the drawing-room, it fell to my lot to try and entertain Miss Tutterton; but she was so short in her manner, there was such an odd mixture of abruptness and military flash about her, that she dazed and frightened me. She showed me clearly that she did not care to be bothered speaking to a lady, and I felt I was altogether of the wrong sex. I was taken with a shy fit, and to my great annoyance found I had not a word to say. The "Drill-sergeant" scared me.

It was evident, from Miss Tutterton's masculine and strangely inelegant movements, that she had served her time, most likely in the dragoons. Sir Horace must have got a commission for her when she was quite young. She walked as if she expected her sword and sabretache would hit her shins; so at each

step, she gave a twist to get out of the way. I was convinced it could only have been during a military career that Miss Tutterton had learnt to go right-about-left, but I could not imagine where she had picked up her trick of saying "thankee." Lady Tutterton did not say "thankee." Perhaps Miss Tutterton caught the trick when quartered in the colonies, for it sounds as if it might have come from the confines of America. Certainly it was the oddest of tricks; and what odd tricks people can give themselves!

When the gentlemen came up from the dining-room, Miss Tutterton went to the piano. My cousin stood beside her; and when she nodded her head, he turned over the pages. Without a hint, he could not have turned them over at the right moment, for he knew nothing whatever of music. I could not help thinking this was all for the best, as two great amateur musicians ought never to marry. I cannot imagine them living together in peace.

When Miss Tutterton came to the end of her song—and it was a long one—she said to me, "Must positively sing it again! Practising for old Sam!"

Surprise gave me sufficient courage to exclaim, "Practising to please an old Samuel, Miss Tutterton! I should have thought that at present you only cared to sing to a young Denis!"

Miss Tutterton stared at me in mute amazement. I saw she had not a notion what I meant; and no wonder, because I afterwards discovered that SAM

meant a Society of Amateur Musicians, and that she was taking this opportunity of practising for a concert rehearsal! The music was fearfully learned. I did not dislike it, though I thought it unnecessarily difficult—too much execution in it, and too little soul. But mamma and Aunt Jane were much bored at having to sit silent for nearly an hour while Miss Tutterton practised what they afterwards declared were “mausoleum dirges.” My mother did not like classical music. One of her reasons always struck me as being a curious bit of musical criticism. She would say, the few times she had been at Exeter Hall to hear an oratorio, she had seen more dowdy frights amongst the chorus and audience than she had seen elsewhere in the whole course of her life. The scarlet opera-cloaks disgusted her with Handel.

Sir Horace said “Hush!” if Aunt Jane ventured on a whisper. Sir Hoighty-Toighty was not a bad nickname, and hit off the crusty old disciplinarian well. Both parents paid deferential attention to their daughter’s music. My mother politely remarked to Sir Hoighty-Toighty, that Miss Tutterton sang most tastefully; but he received the mild compliment with evident contempt.

Lady Tutterton behaved more civilly. “Your daughter has a charming talent for music, Lady Tutterton.”

“You are too kind, Mrs Thursley — too kind! now really you are! but Georgina is passionately fond of it, and is always happy to sing for her friends.

There is no pleasure, Mrs Sherbrook, like giving pleasure to others."

Certainly Aunt Jane was right. Lady Tutterton's sentiments were admirable, and the way she expressed them added to their beauty. Her smile was sweetness itself, and she smiled exactly at the right moment: she seemed to have perfect command of her countenance. It would have been impossible to tell if she recognised Mrs Thubs and the plain platter-face. Her politeness to my mother, to Aunt Jane, and even to me, had a shade of flattery in its excessive deference. Lady Tutterton was singularly unlike her husband and daughter.

My cousin asked mamma if Lady Tutterton were not a charming woman. "Must allow," said he, "fell in love with the mother before the daughter." Most undoubtedly Lady Tutterton appeared to have fallen in love with Denis. She paid him the most unceasing and flattering attention.

I was much struck by the pride my cousin seemed to take in Miss Tutterton's distinguished position as a leader amongst amateur musicians. But I noticed with no small amount of surprise, that it was not her really great musical talent which he admired. He did not look upon music with an art-loving eye. It was the social aspect of song which caught his quick sight. I have since remarked that it catches many an eye like his. If a lady sings, or if people who entertain fancy she can sing, she is made much of in that set where ladies long to be admired—a set where

Royalty will ask to be introduced to you, and will beg for an *encore*, and where you will have the opportunity of saying, "I had to sing it again for the Prince. Such a bore!" It was from my cousin's conversation at dinner that I gathered this knowledge. I had thought people only sang because they loved music, but I now perceived there are some who practise incessantly because they wish to get on in society. I had heard Denis telling my mother how "her Royal Highness would become member Society Amateur Musicians. Did not want her. Was to have taken chief solo at concert. Gave it up last hour. Georgina most good-naturedly sang in her stead. Princess very much obliged. Awful bore for Georgina!" I do not know to which of the Royal Family my cousin alluded; I only know it bored Georgina to sing for the Princess.

Lady Tutterton, her daughter, and my cousin were "going on" to several *at homes*. My cousin impressed this fact upon us by frequent repetition. "Dumbledore's, Lereker's. Must manage Furley's. Other drums take their chance. Promised Travis."

My mother said a few words to Miss Tutterton of the pleasure she felt in making her acquaintance. It was a kind little speech; but I think it was rather thrown away on the bride-elect, for this lady only said "Thankee!" and left the room abruptly.

As my mother was speaking, I looked round and saw Denis was at that moment preparing to make a stylish exit; so I opened both folding-doors, and Denis

left the room by the help of his shirt-cuffs, and in as telling a manner as he had entered it.

I rejoiced when our new connections had said good-night, for I am not quite sure I think a family party the pleasant thing it is supposed to be. *

Aunt Jane was more delighted than ever with Lady Tutterton. "Such charming manners, and such truly Christian sentiments! How I wish Miss Tutterton were like her!"

"Then," said I, "you wish the daughter were as good an actress as the mother. It is true the Drill-sergeant is a military man, but I think at least he is sincere."

"Child! child!" exclaimed my aunt; "child, what will become of you?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE wedding took place at the end of the season. The Sherbrooks went to it, and so did we. The Clarckes were there. Lady Clarcke and Lady Tutterton are first cousins. They were both handsome girls, of better fortune than family. Lady Clarcke brought her husband £60,000, and an extra *c* to his name. They say that immediately after her marriage she insisted on the *c* or a separation. When at last she signed herself with a *c* before her *k*, it is said Lady Clarcke felt she herself had come over with the Conqueror, and not with the money-lending Jews.

There is nothing particular to tell about the wedding, except that Miss Tutterton had only two bride's-maids. Miss Tutterton said she "would not have a pack of women at her tail." The two bridesmaids were Fanny Clarcke and Miss Eleanor Warbattle. Lady Clarcke told us, this latter middle-aged young lady was Lord George's niece, and a charming pianiste in the fashionable-classical style.

Mr Travis, Lord Furley's eldest son, was the best-man.

After the wedding, my mother and I went down to Sherbrook Hall, and spent a month there with much advantage to our souls. While we were there, Aunt Jane was edified by a visit from Lady Arabella Scott. I happened to be out when this rainbow of charity called ; but I heard the black silk skirts had been forwarded to Turkey, and that Lady Arabella was now more particularly interested in the Egyptian wife and mother, for the reforms so urgently required in Constantinople were found to be equally needed in Cairo.

They never saw much company at Sherbrook Hall, so we had hardly any other visitors except the Rector and Mary Sherbrook. Poor Mary Sherbrook ! she is an amiable dummy. As to Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, I am thankful to say, she was away in Scotland on a collecting tour, visiting her late husband's relations. We could bear to stay our month at Sherbrook Hall, better when Mrs Stewart was away, than when she was at Riverbank. We left Sherbrook the morning of the day my cousin and his bride were to arrive at Harefield Abbey. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was expected at Riverbank the same day.

The Sherbrooks had intended paying the Rigardy-Wrenstones the very great compliment of calling on them immediately. Aunt Jane wrote to mamma that "Edward" had purposed accompanying her, as, for her sake, he was willing to pay this attention to her only brother's only son ; "but Denis," continued my aunt, "has given out, through Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart,

that he does not wish to be visited till next Monday fortnight."

"Catherine Stewart!" exclaimed my mother; "how I wish she would not meddle or give out anything!"

"To meddle is her mission in life," said I. "But never mind, my dear; read on." So mamma took up the letter again and read—

"Denis does not wish to be visited till next Monday fortnight, when, he says, he will be happy to receive those who are entitled to call upon Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. This is very condescending of Denis, and Edward and I wonder if we are entitled to call upon our nephew's wife." The expression "entitled to call" had clearly offended the Sherbrooks.

Aunt Jane wrote to my mother much oftener than usual for some little time to come. She frequently mentioned "Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," for it would appear my cousin's wife was never to be addressed by her Christian name. Denis particularly requested his relations would not take the liberty of calling his wife Georgina. My aunt wrote to us,—“And when Catherine told us that Denis had asked her to tell us this, what do you suppose Edward actually said to Catherine? Why, he said: ‘Mrs Stewart, my nephew is taking an unnecessary precaution, for it is highly improbable any one of us would have thought of calling Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone Georgina. I might have been tempted to call my new relation George; but I shall not do so now, you may tell my nephew, unless especially requested.’ And Edward really did say all

this!" We both exclaimed, "Wonderful!" and I felt sure Uncle Sherbrook's great effort of speech must have recalled to Aunt Jane's Scriptural mind, the eloquence of Balaam's ass.

I think Denis made a mistake when he desired his relations not to call his wife Georgina. He offended them by doing so, and put them in a bad humour; and then "Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone" proved too formal for the family circle. So the consequence was, that before long, our distinguished connection was the only lady I know who was invariably mentioned by a nickname amongst her husband's relations. We sometimes called her the "Drill-sergeant," but not often, for we considered this name to be the property of old "Sam." As Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has a trick of twisting her shoulders and very high-stepping action when she walks, we generally called her "Jumping Georgy." We might indeed have nicknamed her "Thankee," and it would have been shorter. It is strange that all the Tuttertons should have nicknames.

Aunt Jane's letters still continued.

My aunt said, the Monday on which the Wrenstones had announced they would receive those "entitled to call," was a wet day; and I can well believe the possibility of taking out Robert Jones and the horses in the rain, never even entered the Sherbrooks' head. Some people make up their mind to do a certain thing on a certain day. They may be a week, a fortnight, and longer, waiting for the settled time, without wavering; but should an accident prevent their doing what

they intended on the day fixed, their mind becomes unmoored, and they seem to go back over the old waters, striking upon rocks they had struck on before, and asking your advice as to how they should steer—using, perhaps, the very arguments they had already used and you had answered.

From the wet Monday until the following Thursday week, which Aunt Jane wrote “was dry, *D.G.*,” the Sherbrooks appear to have discussed all over again whether they should call on their nephew and his bride, or wait till the Wrenstones visited them. In the end, it seems it was entirely owing to Aunt Jane that the Sherbrooks drove over to the Abbey on the afternoon of the Thursday which “was dry, *D.G.*” I read the letter my aunt wrote to mamma giving an account of this first visit to Harefield. Aunt Jane’s was a leaden, a dead pen, and not a living one expressing living thoughts. My aunt did not usually write like a human being with passions and changing emotions, but rather as if she copied her blotless letters out of a pious letter-writer in which they had forgotten to print all the stops. I was therefore astonished, in this particular letter, to feel a real warm sentiment trying to force itself through Aunt Jane’s unwieldy style, like a drowning man through ice.

When Aunt Jane drove along the well-known avenue and drew near to the Abbey house, old feelings seem to have come back to her, surprising her heart into softness and emotion. She thought of the day when she had gone in haste to the Abbey, hearing

her brother was dying ; and she remembered looking up at the windows of "poor dear Denis's room," and seeing the blinds pulled down, "and I knew he was dead ; and now as Robert was walking the horses up the hill just near the hall-door (you know, Sophia), I looked up again at the same windows and I saw the blinds were pulled up, and that there were white lace curtains and rose-coloured ones inside, and I prayed the Almighty would not send His Angel of Death to this house for many years so that the newly married husband and wife might not be called upon to separate in their youth, and although you well know, my dear Sophia, that our only brother's only son is not what he might be, still I will allow I did wish to welcome him to his home, and I did feel that Providence lets the old people linger on in this vale of tears that they may forgive and be kind to the young ones."

Aunt Jane's letter then went on to describe how Thomas got off the box to ring at the hall-door ; and how she proposed to Edward they should walk into the house without ringing, and surprise their nephew, as she used to do in poor dear Denis's lifetime ; and how Edward strongly advised her not to do so, but to wait till the butler answered the bell ; and how the butler came at last, and two footmen also ; and how, when the butler was asked if Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was at home, he had answered so that Aunt Jane and my uncle could hear him in the carriage—"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is not at home. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is at luncheon. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will not be

at home this afternoon. At present, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone only receives three times a-week—on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays.” “And so,” continued my aunt, “we left cards as if we were strangers and not relations and we had to turn round and drive home, and Edward said it would be a very long time before he paid Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone another visit.”

“I think,” said my mother, “it is a little foolish to make enemies where you might make friends. Jane is not bad-hearted, and she would really like to be friends with Denis and his wife—if only,” added mamma, smiling, “to have the friendly relation’s privilege of finding fault with the new establishment. She might cast her bread upon fresh waters.” And then, blushing for the honour of her family, my mother said, “Sophy, I am grieved the young people are giving themselves airs. It is bad style. It is very vulgar to bring London ways and manners into country parts.”

As the winter wore on, Aunt Jane’s correspondence with my mother slackened. We heard less and less of the Rigardy-Wrenstones. There was no intimacy between Sherbrook and Harefield. However, if my aunt happened to write early in the week, she did generally mention having met Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone at church, and then she invariably added some weighty remark about the “thin end of the wedge.” This led us to imagine there was something in Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone which suggested the thin end of the wedge. Now merely to look at Jumping Georgy, you would have said she was the longer and the thicker end.

Aunt Jane and my uncle, Snipkins and the little black bag, arrived in Montagu Square at the beginning of the London season. The Sherbrooks had travelled up to town in the same train, but not in the same carriage, with the Rigardy-Wrenstones; my cousins went in a *coupé* by themselves.

We did not "go out" often this season; for when the Sherbrooks got an invitation, they rarely accepted it, and Aunt Jane did not like us to leave her and "Edward" at home. The Clarkes gave no ball, much to Aunt Jane's satisfaction. My aunt seemed to think they were "awakening." We only went to three or four crushes. Lady Arabella gave a musical crush, and Aunt Jane went to it. Lady Arabella told Aunt Jane she had intended getting up a concert for the benefit of Christian Egyptian women suffering from ophthalmia, but had found she could not manage it. Lady Arabella was much to be pitied. I heard her say, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, I know *you* will feel for me! I fear I shall be unable to give ~~any~~ annual charity concert. Miss Tut——Mrs Rigardy - Wrenstone, I mean—won't sing. She says her throat is delicate; but, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, it is last year's solo, and the Pasha. It is the Pasha! And then Mrs Elmer—tiresome woman!—declares she cannot allow Miss Ermyintrude to sing more than one solo and one duet. And Lord Studhorsey—he is laid up with bronchitis; and the Chevalier de Clairon has gone to Vienna. And would you believe it?—I am *so* unlucky!—it was only last week that Mr Reginald Meltem and the

my

Elmer-Elmers had a tiff. He is quite the charming tenor when he sings with a soprano. So there was a *dénouement*, and Mrs Elmer-Elmer told Mr Reginald Meltem she could not allow him to sing '*t'amo*' with *her* daughter. The Baron, poor dear creature, he will sing with anybody—if only he had not lost those two high notes! I myself, unfortunately, cannot sing just at present, as I have a return of my peculiar sore-throat. The Baron will play, it is true, and so will Madame Scratchowitz—exquisite pianiste! But who cares to listen to the piano? Ah, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, there is no real taste for music in this country!"

I wondered Lady Arabella did not get hold of Lord George Warbattle and the Spanish solo; but I have since heard that Lord George is Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's own particular property, and never by any chance sings the Spanish solo where Miss Elmer-Elmer performs.

At Lady Arabella's musical crush, we had only a solo from Miss Elmer-Elmer, and a duet from the same charming soprano and the Baron von Klammerhammer. Really, the poor old Baron surprised me: with the help of the eye-glass and the tiptoes, he almost caught his high notes! Connoisseurs say he is quite an *artiste*. Indeed it is wonderful how every one has a good word for the Baron von Klammerhammer. Perhaps it is because no one is jealous of him.

We also had a duet on the piano from Madame Scratchowitz and the Baron. I think they played one of Beethoven's sonatas; but I am not quite sure,

for as soon as they began to play, everybody began to talk. The piano is the one thing in England which seems to give the power of speech to our silent nation.

My mother met Lady Clarke for a moment at Lady Arabella's. Aunt Jane spoke to Lady Tutterton. The Wrenstones were not with her. My Lady Tuttut did not appear very cordial to Aunt Jane. Lady Tutterton went out of the room during Miss Elmer-Elmer's solo, and sat in an adjoining boudoir talking all the time to a friend; yet, in the course of the evening, I observed Lady Tutterton and Mrs Elmer-Elmer bow to each other with profuse politeness.

Nothing could exceed Tuttut's cordiality of manner to Lady Arabella. This surprised me, for Lady Arabella was anything but cordial to her.

I met the Clarke girls. They nodded, but did not speak to me. They were too much occupied, each one with her especial admirer. Louisa was looking up at Mr Scott, smiling delightedly as she listened to him. She wore the same smile I had seen her wear last year at her own ball.

The Clarkes' crush took place the night after Lady Arabella's. Theirs was also a musical *at home*. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was the Clarkes' prima-donna, notwithstanding the delicacy of her throat. I need hardly say Miss Elmer-Elmer did not appear.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone sang three solos, and one duet with Lord George Warbattle. Lord George gave us the Spanish solo. Being clapped, he sang it a second time. I think he would have liked to sing it

a third. We had no tenor. Mr Reginald Meltem never sang with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. He was reported to be in mortal terror of the "Drill-sergeant." It was said the Drill-sergeant had told him he had no method, and had offered to teach him how to bring out his voice from the right place. Mr Reginald Meltem did not appreciate this kindness as he should have done, so he took to singing '*t'amo*' with Miss Elmer-Elmer, and ceased to bring out his voice before Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. Just fancy my surprise when I looked round and saw Fanny and Louisa Clarke standing up to sing a duet! In old times they had not a notion of music. The one who did not sing flat, sung sharp. I was astonished to hear them now perform an Italian duet with three runs and a shake in it! and really quite passably!—a little screaming here and there; not much expression anywhere; still in time, and not altogether out of tune. A miracle, I declare! Those London singing-masters work wonders.

In the beginning of June the Tuttertons sent us a card for an *at home*. Aunt Jane, mamma, and I went to this party—Uncle Sherbrook would not come. Lady Tutterton received us with marked coldness, as if she had not expected us to accept her invitation. I could hardly prevent my aunt from expressing her astonishment in one of her loud whispers.

At homes are dull affairs, unless you have a very large acquaintance, and the power of moving about in a dense crowd. I perceived the Clarks in the far distance of a back drawing-room. Louisa was looking

particularly pretty. The gentleman at whom she was smiling stood with his back to me. I thought Mr David Scott appeared taller than usual; and no wonder, for when this gentleman happened to turn round, I saw Louisa's friend was not Mr Scott, but some other man! I wondered if Louisa smiled delightedly and looked up at every one she spoke to, and if she found all mankind equally agreeable. I thought how much a pretty or an ugly face might change the nature of a girl; and I wondered if, having a pretty face, I too should find everybody delightful, and should wear the same sweet smile for all the world. I could not conceive myself ~~a~~ ^{an} universally amiable creature, without strong likes and dislikes; but then I could not imagine poor Sophy with a handsome face.

While I was thinking of these things, Denis passed through the crowd beside us, and nodded to my mother and Aunt Jane. My aunt was not content with a nod from her only brother's only son, so she pressed forwards and shook hands with her nephew.

"Very hot!" cried he; "such a crowd! great bore! could not leave out any one, you know. People awfully offended! Going down to Harefield soon! Must look you up before I go." And he smiled, gave a slight wave of his hand, and turned to an elderly lady at my elbow. "Oh, Lady Grace! delighted to see you! Won't you take an ice?" Lady Grace accepted, and my cousin begging me to stand aside, made way for her.

We saw Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone in a distant corner

talking to Miss Eleanor Warbattle. Lord George passed us on the stairs, and I wondered we had not the Spanish solo in the course of the evening. But this was not a musical *at home*. Perhaps Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's voice was again in a delicate state; or perhaps, having frightened Mr Reginald Meltem, she was at a loss for a tenor. Certainly one Spanish solo, even twice encored, would not quite constitute a concert in itself, though I daresay Lord George might think it would.

The Sherbrooks insisted on our asking the Tuttertons to dinner, as our house was not large enough for an *at home*.

"Edward and I know what you ought to do, Sophia," said Aunt Jane.

The Tuttertons refused the invitation, saying they would be out of town on the 1st of July. That very day we happened to see Lady Tutterton and Sir Horace driving together in Hyde Park. Aunt Jane was much shocked to find Lady Tutterton had refused our invitation on a false pretence. When Aunt Jane refused an invitation, she made a point of giving her real, true reasons. My mother was neither surprised nor angry. At first my aunt was convinced there must be some mistake, and she expected Lady Tutterton would call next day to apologise. But Lady Tutterton did not call at our house. She had not left town, for we saw her again several times in the Park. She recognised us once, and bowed most graciously.

"I can see," said my mother, "that Lady Tutterton

would never cut you; but she well understands the art of dropping you."

"What have we done," I exclaimed, "that she should cut us or drop our acquaintance? What an extraordinary woman she must be!"

"An extraordinary woman, Sophy?—no; a very, very ordinary one," retorted my mother; "there are numbers like her to be found in town. She has married her daughter to my nephew: the thing is done; so why should she now be civil or flattering to me? I do not entertain in the style she admires. I am not rich, and I have no titled charms wherewith to fascinate her. *Parvenus* like Lady Tutterton worship rank, and love riches, because riches can entertain them. They hate to keep up any useless acquaintance. I know the world, because I have lived many years in London since your father's death, without being rich or grand."

"I don't believe," I exclaimed, indignantly—"I don't believe there is another woman in London as worldly as Lady Tutterton. Insulting woman! I detest her!"

My mother laughed—"Sophy, Sophy," she said, "I wonder you are not indifferent to her! I wonder you can waste hatred on a mere stranger. I could not hate like that. If ever I were to hate——" She hesitated, was silent a moment, and then,—“I could not hate,” she began; “no, Sophy, I feel I could not even hate those I once had loved, . . . and I did love that boy! You see I had no son of my own. And now he cuts me! . . . But we old people,” she added, gently, “do not hate. Cold worldliness, ingratitude, disappointing

carelessness, no longer send us into angry passions. They only weary us, and make us feel our hearts are withered, like our poor old faces. If you were not kind to me, dear child, I should just die." She put her arm lovingly round my neck. "Don't look so angry; you are too violent, too ignorant, Sophy! The world is indeed worldly. Every one knows it, and I have known it for years. . . . But I am like you, Sophy, though I am an old woman. . . . I can hardly believe it!"

Denis called on us as he was leaving town. He had not called before. My mother and I were at home. My mother received him kindly. Denis talked incessantly. He asked questions, and answered them himself. My cousin lisped every now and then, and left out many of the small words.

"Going down to Harefield," said he; "thought look you up first. Furleys coming to us. Travis, no bad gun; nor Lady Julia either. House full—Furleys, Tuttertons, Hartmoors, Castletowers, Dumbledores. Lady Castletower never been that part of country. We go to them. On to Castle Travis. One house to another. Don't know when home again." Denis did not pay a long visit. I was not sorry when he went away.

Aunt Jane left us early in July. She and my uncle wanted us to spend the month of August with them as usual, but my mother refused to go to Sherbrook Hall, and for once she had a good excuse. Denis had never said to her, "When you are at Sherbrook, you must

come and see me in my new home." So she said, "If I go to the neighbourhood, Sophy, Denis will think I wish for an invitation to his house. He is the very man to say so." I could not contradict this, for it was true—indeed I was as glad as my mother to think we should not have to spend our usual month this year at Sherbrook Hall.

Towards the end of July, Aunt Jane came up to town for a day to consult Madame Julie Browne about the mourning she ought to wear for the wife of a first cousin once removed. My aunt lunched with us. She told us that, for some reason or other, she could not tell why, most of the visitors expected at the Abbey were not coming, and that Catherine declared the Rigardy-Wrenstones would go away on a tour of visits before long; and my aunt said, if they did go, we must come down to Sherbrook Hall. She told us she could not ask her nephew and niece anything about their plans herself, because she never saw them except at church; and she spoke vaguely, yet solemnly, of the progress of the thin end of the wedge. She then passed on to Madame Julie Browne's lax ideas of mourning. I perceived we should have heard a great deal more of the Rigardy-Wrenstones and the thin end of the wedge, only for a difference of opinion which had arisen between Aunt Jane and Madame Julie Browne. My aunt thought you ought most decidedly to wear crape on the body of your dress when you went into mourning for the wife of a first cousin once removed, while it appeared Madame Julie said crape never went be-

yond a first cousin, and not always so far; she considered jet trimmings a sufficient compliment to the memory of more distant relations. "And what will Catherine say," cried my aunt, "if she sees me in a plain black silk?" Poor dear Aunt Jane returned to Sherbrook in a perturbed state of mind. I rejoice to say we heard, a few days after, that Madame Julie did consent to put a crape *ruche* round the neck and cuffs of Aunt Jane's new dress. I was glad to hear this, for I knew the crape would give Aunt Jane peace and satisfaction, and enable her to feel comfortable under Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's discerning eye.

On the last day of July, Aunt Jane wrote to tell us the Rigardy-Wrenstones had started off northwards, and that in the village it was said they had gone to Balmoral, but that Catherine said they were going to visit the Hartmoors, Castletowers, and Furleys, besides the Dukes of Dumbledore, Sutherland, and Argyll. "So they will be a long time away," wrote my aunt; "therefore Edward and I insist, Sophia, that you and Sophy come as usual and pay us your annual visit."

This was very kind of my uncle and aunt; but we were sorry the Rigardy-Wrenstones were gone, as now we had no good excuse to keep us away from Harefield. We had to go and stay at Sherbrook Hall. I was never happy there, and my mother used to be quite miserable.

CHAPTER IX.

"LITTLE things are not little things, if they are done like great ones." This favourite saying of Uncle Sherbrook's was his own portrait painted in words. My uncle cut the 'Morning Post' at the side-table, before breakfast and after prayers, with the grave face of a man who knows he is performing an important action.

The Sherbrooks breakfasted at eight o'clock, but often and often, it would happen that they did not leave the table till half-past nine or a quarter to ten. The conversation usually dawdled on in this style: "Jane, you say you have heard from Charlotte. How is Tom?"

"Charlotte says she hears poor Tom is better; but his wife is still very ill, Edward." Then Aunt Jane would read out lengthy extracts from Charlotte Stewart's letter. These distant Stewarts wrote the heaviest, most long-winded letters, full of Biblical texts, and giving detailed accounts of the health, doings, and deaths of the whole Stewart connection. Aunt Jane thought them sensible, interesting, improving letters. She would read them all out, but

mingling her own remarks with what she read: "Inflammation of the bronchial tubes! Tom should wear the cold compress, and take a globule of aconite going to bed. 'I fear, my dear Jane, that poor Tom's poor dear wife's earthly course is run, for our days here below are numbered.' Yes, indeed—very true, Charlotte! We should always be ready for death; and, dear me! I shall have to stay in mourning if Mary dies, and that yellow-striped dress will never be worn out, for she is your second cousin, Edward?"

"Second once removed."

"Did I ever see her?"

"I think not, Jane; but you have seen her sister, Amy MacNaughten."

"Ah, yes! I remember. Then she must be your second cousin once removed, because Amy MacNaughten's mother was your second . . . No, she was your first . . . No, I am quite right; she was your second cousin. But now listen, Edward—here is good news! This will be a blessed comfort to poor Tom! 'The son in Australia has turned out an admirable, Christian-minded young man, and we hear he teaches regularly in the Sunday-schools at Melbourne.' It was Robert went to Australia? Was not it, Edward?"

"No, I think it was Richard."

"My dear Edward——"

"I believe you are right, Jane; it was Robert."

Aunt Jane often knew more about the distant Stewarts than Uncle Sherbrook; she certainly took more interest in them.

"Edward, would you like to see what Charlotte says?" Uncle Sherbrook would thank his wife, and read the letter all over again, but without comment. He then offered Aunt Jane some of the letters he had received; and though I doubt not she imagined that she read them to herself, in reality we had the benefit of the correspondence.

The Sherbrooks, I am sure, found the day too long; but they would not shorten it by a later breakfast, so they were delighted to dawdle away an hour or more of the tedious morning. I wonder my mother and I did not die of impatience, for we were expected to sit on at table and listen to the interminable letters penned by "Charlotte," or by "poor dear John's widow," or by "Henrietta's daughter." That "dear, excellent, indefatigable creature, Catherine Stewart," was at home at Riverbank, otherwise we should have had her letters as well. When she was off on her "collecting tours," she wrote constantly to my aunt. "Catherine considers me the head of the family," Aunt Jane would say, with much satisfaction; "so she often writes to me, and always calls me 'my dear Mrs Sherbrook;' but I call her 'my dear Catherine'—and she likes it, because she told me to call her Catherine, and never to call her Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; and Catherine calls me Mrs Sherbrook because she considers Edward the head of the family."

The meals at Sherbrook Hall were serious ceremonies, preceded by the ringing of sundry bells. There was the seven-o'clock bell, merely to tell you it

was seven o'clock; then the prayer-bell; then the breakfast-bell. At a quarter to one the warning-bell rang. This bell was intended to prepare your mind for the one-o'clock luncheon-bell. There was an afternoon-tea bell—a smaller tinkle, it is true. Then at half-past five came the dressing-bell; at five minutes to six the frightening-bell; and the dinner-bell at six o'clock *punctually*. By *punctually*, I do not mean anything within the bounds of the Christian religion. I mean a heathen, unrelenting exactness: to the minute! as the clock strikes!

Uncle Sherbrook made punctuality the great virtue of life; and certainly it was very necessary for my uncle to be so wonderfully punctual, because most days he was much occupied in doing nothing. It is true he used to write to his attorney, Mr Jones, regularly twice a-week about that right-of-way lawsuit. When at length a decision was given in his favour, and against the rights of the village, he still continued writing to Mr Jones every Tuesday and Friday. I expect this correspondence had become a habit. Uncle Sherbrook was a very methodical man, and I can well imagine his liking to do at ten o'clock on Tuesday and Friday one year, exactly the same thing he had done on Tuesday and Friday the year before. When he changed his attorney, it made a slight difference. My uncle wrote to Mr Buggle three times a-week instead of twice—on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. He either received a blue-buggle in return, or a visit from the solicitor-and-agent himself. Uncle

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Sherbrook was not a man of such very, very large property. I would wonder what on earth he and that Buggle could be doing together; and my aunt would draw down the upper lip, and would say, "Young people know nothing of business."

8 Aunt Jane delighted in her punctual bells nearly as much as my uncle did, though sometimes she would mistake one bell for another, and come down too late for dinner, declaring she had thought the dinner-bell was only the frightening-bell. Such mistakes were very natural, and always permissible in the lady of the house. But my poor dear mother was supposed never to get confused in the punctual bells. You were expected to start from your room at the last ring of the frightening-bell, so as to wait down-stairs to be in time for the dinner-bell. If poor mamma were a minute late, she found Uncle Sherbrook waiting at the drawing-room door with his arm ready, and he would march her straight off into the dining-room without saying a word. If the cook that night had happened to put more grease and sound doctrine into the soup than anything else, Aunt Jane would surely remark that no one could expect the soup to be good when it was kept waiting.

But it was when the lost sheep of the house of Israel came down too late, that the words in season poured forth. Having good ears, I used to hear the servants' bells as well as the regular family tinkling. Such bell-ringing, to be sure! Enough to set a good punctual sheep out of its mind, and more than enough

to addle the brains of a wicked black one like me. Bells became a second nature to me. I hardly knew if they were ringing, or if I imagined I heard them. I not unfrequently did make mistakes between warning-bells and luncheon-bells, and frightening-bells and dinner-bells.

Once—or perhaps twice—when I had jumped out of bed, thinking I had heard the seven-o'clock bell, on going down-stairs during the ringing of the next bell, I had met the Snipkins family filing across the hall, all solemn and severe, and had discovered by their looks that I was a sinner late for prayers. I must confess (I cannot be a hypocrite!) that I had felt more glad than sorry. I dreaded meeting my uncle and aunt, especially my uncle. Still it was a relief to have missed those long, those awful prayers! and that long, dreary commentary! How I hated that commentary! It nearly made a heathen of me.

The prayers lasted any length of time. They began with an extempore exhortation to prayer, given by Uncle Sherbrook standing. We then sat down to read the Bible, verse about with the servants. This was indeed a painful ordeal to any one who believes, as I do, that the Bible is the Word of God.

My uncle gave out the chapter, and read the first verse slowly, sonorously. Aunt Jane read the second verse, vigorously accentuating the words she liked best. Then came my dear mother's turn. She felt nervous reading before the Sherbrooks. Then came my verse. Aunt Jane drew down the upper lip; Uncle Sher-

brook looked round at me. When I was younger, he used sometimes to say to me in a perfectly awful voice, "Remember, Sophia, this is a great privilege." I was so much frightened and bewildered, that I never had a notion what I was reading about.

The servants' turn came after ours. Poor things! Aunt Jane would say, "Mary-Anne, read the fifth verse."

"Please, mum, it is Tummus's."

Thomas was the page-boy. "Thomas," Aunt Jane said every morning of her life—"Thomas, it is a great privilege to read the Lord's Word."

"Yes, mum; I know, mum," answered Thomas, and he spelt out a verse syllable by syllable. He had been tutored by Snipkins, so he did not go too fast.

"Mary-Anne," said Aunt Jane, "the sixth verse." Unhappy Mary-Anne! She always turned scarlet. I pitied her. She set off full gallop, came to grief, and was corrected by Uncle Sherbrook in a solemn manner. Aunt Jane has often told me that Uncle Sherbrook, being head of the house, was the stronger vessel. "It is his duty to correct, Sophy, for he can do so with all authority."

One morning Mary-Anne began, as if panting for life, "'A forward young man said——"

"Gently, Mary-Anne—gently," put in my uncle; "'a froward man soweth strife.'"

Mary-Anne stopped. The "forward young man," came out with a jerk.

"Froward man; not forward young man. I have corrected you before, Mary-Anne!"

My uncle's voice was loud. There was a pause. The kitchen-maid stuttered, "A fro . . . fro . . . a forward man said to his wife . . ."

"Stop, Mary-Anne!—stop! Look at the text, I desire you!" But the unfortunate Mary-Anne had lost her head. She could think of nothing but the forward young man.

Uncle Sherbrook having spoken too loud, the kitchen-maid's verse ended in tears. I pitied her with all my heart! but oh, it was ludicrous! The pomposity of my uncle and aunt! The terror of Mary-Anne! The queer mistakes! The forward young man! My mother and I dared not look at each other. We gazed out of the window, and tried hard not to laugh; but we were cursed with slippery mouths. I felt mine twitch most painfully. Those who are blessed with a grave face (it is a blessing!) cannot conceive the tortures my mother and I went through. And then, when the kitchen-maid had finished gabbling, Emma, or rather Hemmer, Snipkins, the cook, began to aspirate at her leisure. Oh the sanctimonious propriety of that admirable, haspirating Snipkins family! And the look of them! When at last it was the privilege of Aunt Jane's own maid, Sarah Snipkins, to edify us, I could only turn my back to her and cover my face with my hands, for fear the demon of laughter should master me outright. I fear Snipkins perceived her hemphasis of all the long words

amused me. I think this was one reason why she hated me; for she did hate me in quite an extraordinary manner. I never shall forget her emphasis on the word "Haristarchus"! This superior person tried to read like Aunt Jane, and she partly succeeded. Snipkins was the exaggeration of her mistress's virtues, with the letter "h" superadded.

Some days the servants' reading was not so ludicrous as others. I thanked God for this! I felt very glad when poor Mary-Anne left. She went away shortly after we came to Sherbrook Hall. She was an excellent kitchen-maid, but not suited to Aunt Jane's establishment. I happened to be present when she came to speak to Aunt Jane. She told her she "knowed it was a great privilege to read the Lord's Word; for didn't Mrs Sherbrook tell Tummus so hevery blessed morning? But Lor! she supposed she never was, nor never could be, good. She could clean the pans, and do the pertaters and vegebles; and if Miss Hemmer would let her, which she would not, she knowed right well she could do the dinner. But she never knowed how it was, when she was reading the Bible, the words came wrong like; and Mr Sherbrook, he looked hawful like, which she seed she did not give satisfaction to Mr Sherbrook, which she was sorry for, but she wished to leave."

The forward young woman was replaced by a village girl—a worse kitchen-maid, but an attentive Sunday-scholar. Such a comfort! It was quite enough for one's edification to have Tummus, the Snipkins family,

and Aunt Jane. When the Bible-reading finished, my aunt stood up and read out a hymn as she alone can read. I never knew any one else do this. She chose the longest hymn she could find. It was the only bit of the service she had all to herself, for we joined in the responses. We were thankful Aunt Jane did not sing her hymn; it was better for her to read it.

The Rev. Dr MacShaw's Commentary followed the hymn. It began with three verses of the Bible, taken in the morning from the Old Testament, in the evening from the New. No matter what the verses were, the Commentary was always three pages long—a page to each verse. On Sunday we had four verses and four pages.

The prayers, which Uncle Sherbrook read after the Commentary, were also composed by this Rev. Dr MacShaw. They did not ask for those things my soul longed for; and when I wanted comfort, I found they gave none. They were written in mystical language, and prayed for queer out-of-the-way people and things. The blacks were never forgotten, and there was always a great deal about Modern Babylons, Zions, and New Jerusalems. The more practical parts were in this style: "And we pray Thee, O Lord, have mercy on the rising generation, which is like grass in the wilderness; and teach our youth the error of its ways; and make those ancient cities, where the young at certain seasons do dwell, to be like the heavenly Jerusalem, whose streets are paved with gold, and her

gates like the sardine stone." I supposed these cities meant Oxford and Cambridge. Uncle Sherbrook would lay great stress on the words, "teach our youth the error of its ways," and would look round at me, and then at Thomas. Aunt Jane would look round also. If poor Thomas happened to be asleep, he was afterwards reprimanded by Aunt Jane and fined a penny. I never went to sleep. Although I was not fined a penny, in reality I was more wicked than "Tummus;" for I stayed awake, yawned, and hated the Rev. Dr MacShaw! Aunt Jane and my uncle had attended the ministrations of this "Light" just about the time of their marriage, and I verily believe they had flirted over the Commentary! It is the only flirtation I can imagine my aunt to have been capable of.

It was owing to the Rev. Dr MacShaw's interpretation of the text, "They had all things common," that my uncle and aunt read the Bible verse about with their servants. It seems, many years ago, the Sherbrooks' great Light preached a sermon on this text from the pulpit of his then most fashionable chapel near Belgrave Square, and he afterwards published the edifying discourse. The whole edition was speedily sold. Aunt Jane gloried in this fact. For my part, I never felt much astonished at the popularity of this sermon, though it was a dull one. I daresay the reverend Doctor's Belgravian admirers liked the idea of sharing the Bible with all men, better than they might have done the notion of having some other things in common with their poorer neighbours.

When my mother and I went to Sherbrook Hall, we found Mrs Stewart still at Riverbank, and not yet gone off collecting northwards. We wished she would go away, for we saw a great deal of her—a great deal more than we cared to see! She never was a favourite of mine.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart is a little, dark, piercing-eyed, pinched-together woman, who leaves on your mind the impression of a rasping voice and everlasting tatting. It is said she once tatted an aisle to a church. This meant, that she had tatted so many cap-lappets, collars, and butterflies, and sold them so well, that the money had built the aisle of a church. Ever since I knew her, I think she must have been tatting a steeple. She irritated my dear mother exceedingly by the unceasing motion of her shuttle. She would not even stop while mamma spoke to her, and she tatted while she answered. She would bring her tatting to the dinner-table, and tatt between the courses. This annoyed my uncle. The click-click of the shuttle was unsuited to the serious ceremony of dinner. I could see he thought the tatting a breach of good manners.

That "excellent, indefatigable creature, Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart," reigned over Aunt Jane like an archbishop. "She has sound Church of England principles; and I wish you would take pattern by her, Sophy, for she is always occupied in a good work, and never sits with her hands folded before her; because remember, Sophy, Satan will find work for idle hands to do."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had been left a widow with one son many years ago. Her husband—a cousin of my uncle's mother—had died in a lunatic asylum. My private opinion is—and ever will be—that Mrs Stewart had tatted away this poor man's nerves till he lost all self-command, and that she had then scolded him in her rasping voice. No wonder he died mad! I had never seen Mrs Stewart in a passion, yet I could not hear her voice and not think how cruel she must be when angry. With the exception of one old Dan, her servants would not stay with her. She was always looking for a cook—though, strange to say, she generally knew of one whom she could highly recommend. There were people who considered Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart “such a good-natured creature.” She frequently got servants for Lady Arabella Scott, and I never knew her that she had not some Christian-minded governess on hand who preferred good principles to a high salary, and for whom she wanted a really happy home in a truly pious family.

Mrs Stewart was the unpaid secretary of six excellent charities, and the paid secretary of seven still more admirable ones. Whenever and wherever you met her, she carried a small workbag full of tatting-cotton and collecting-cards. When this best of women wanted change of air, she went on a collecting tour. Her expenses were paid. She would tell you the labourer was worthy of his hire; so she did a good work and visited her friends at the same time. She loved collecting and visiting. Bazaars were her delight: they

were pleasant excitement, and not wicked like theatres and balls; they brought her into the notice of great people, and enabled her to make new acquaintances. She liked to be acquainted with "nice people"—that is, people of good position, well-off, who could entertain her. As Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart found herself habitually without a cook, she never much cared to dine at home. She was fond of society, and would pop in upon you at luncheon-time, as a pleasant surprise; and if you gave her the slightest encouragement, she would stay on till afternoon tea. She had a decided taste for tea-drinking. When she has been spending a few days in London at a hotel (on a collecting tour), I have known her go to four pious teas in one afternoon. I believe goody people did not dislike her. She was clever, and knew how to make herself useful, and would go to any amount of trouble about any thing or person she had once taken up. Her energetic mind liked interfering and managing. She was a born orderer, and yet she had tact enough only to "arrange" what she felt 'would let itself be arranged. She did not meddle with the impossible—and this was one secret of her success. I think she knew by instinct if you disliked her and her charities. Now she never tried to make me collect, either for her blacks or whites.

Many people thought Mrs Stewart agreeable. I never did. Then I dislike Scriptural language and a rasping voice. I also dislike a stingy woman full of little mean tricks. The admirable Catherine was not

poor, though not exactly rich. It was said she was saving for her son; and certainly she never spent her money. She did not even subscribe to her own charities, though she was hardly to be blamed for not doing so when she got so much money out of other people. Aunt Jane has often told me the committee of the Society for the Promotion of Christianising Influences in the Homes of the East considered Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart the best secretary and collector it ever had. No doubt of her talent! Her being always well dressed when necessary, was perhaps the greatest proof she could give that she really was a clever woman. In a miser, I might almost call her fashionable well-cut black silk an instinct of genius. She knew she would not be so well received by "nice people" and their servants if she looked a mere goody-body, only fit for a side-table. Wearing a loose Garibaldi and a skimping skirt, she would not have been the favourite she was with Lady Arabella Scott.

And oh! what tact Mrs Stewart showed in the choice of her bonnet! She always had three, and I might truly say that each bonnet held different views. The soundest (a very Low-Church one) was a pokey black thing, coming well over the ears, with a curtain behind and big strings before. In this bonnet the best of women collected for the conversion of French infidels. Mrs Stewart's Broader-Church bonnet was less lugubrious than this very "Low" one: though dowdy, it had a coloured feather at one side. She put it on when she came to see Aunt Jane, and I should

say it held much the same views as my aunt's own buttercup tow-row.

The first time I happened to meet Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart at Mineham (Lady Arabella's country place), I must acknowledge I was taken aback. I could hardly believe my eyes. I looked again, and saw the admirable Catherine really did wear the latest French fashion, a *haute nouveauté*, perched on the top of a large chignon! "Well," said I to myself, "this is indeed the thin end of the wedge!" Mrs Stewart instantly put on a thick veil, and let it fall back over her bonnet and chignon, so that Aunt Jane noticed nothing new. I don't wonder; for with the veil on, Mrs Stewart might have been collecting for the French infidels. Mrs Stewart . . . I ought not to say Mrs Stewart; it is a positive insult! But really I cannot always be bothered giving everybody two names! I find Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart too much of a good thing when I have a Mrs Elmer-Elmer amongst my acquaintance, and a Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone for a relation. Besides, the admirable Catherine has no right to be always Sherbrooked as well as Stewarded. Her husband was a third son. Look in the 'Landed Gentry' and you will see his names put down as Charles Henry Sherbrook Gordon Stewart. I expect he had a canny Scotchwoman for a mother, who thought maybe the Gordons might leave her third son something; and that if they did not, there might just be a chance of a wind-fall from a Sherbrook. The poor lunatic never called himself anything but Mr Charles Stewart, perhaps be-

cause he was a lunatic! His widow had all her wits about her; so when she settled at Riverbank, it was Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart who came to live near her dear relations, the Sherbrooks of Sherbrook Hall.

No one ever exactly knew why or how the best of women came to Riverbank. My mother used to say a bitter north wind blew one day right down from Scotland and brought with it a nasty cold drizzle and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; while Aunt Jane considered "that excellent, indefatigable creature" had arrived under a special dispensation of Providence. I am not at all sure my uncle thought a beneficent Providence had brought this lady to the neighbourhood. Her tatting and energy made him feel uncomfortable when he was sitting still in his arm-chair during his quiet hour after dinner. She was altogether too restless and determined a woman for his taste; and then he did not like the Sherbrook she had tacked to her Stewart. He had a great idea of his own name, and did not wish it to be stuck on to any other without his consent. It was well for the widow that her name happened to be Stewart, for my uncle would never have forgiven the impertinent adventuress who had dared to put Sherbrook before Smith, Jones, or Robinson. I cannot truthfully say my uncle actually disapproved of Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, for it was nearly impossible the soundest of men could disapprove of the soundest of women when she held exactly the same views as himself; besides, Aunt Jane managed almost to persuade him that he liked her. As for me, never for one mo-

ment did I think Providence had brought Mrs Stewart to Riverbank ! I well knew she had come there quite of her own accord. She did not stay in the north because she could not get on with the elder brothers' wives. I often heard her say, "They have their good points, and far be it from me, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, to judge them. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. But our paths lie in different valleys. My ways are not their ways." Then came a sigh ; and Aunt Jane sighed too, and seemed to feel much edified. But I could not bear this cant ! I should have preferred to hear Mrs Stewart say : " I dislike my sisters-in-law. We do not agree, and I consider the fault is all on their side. I will go and visit them on my collecting tours, when their houses are convenient hotels ; but I hate them ! " Such words would have shocked Aunt Jane, but not me, because I should have felt they were true. I could well imagine that sisters-in-law do not always love each other, and that the interfering pattern one of a family who professes superior charity and piety, and rarely has a cook, might not always be the most popular with her husband's relations.

I am sure my mother and I wished Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had agreed with her relations in the north. We neither wanted her nor her Scotch drizzle south of the Tweed ; and we sometimes had both ! When the two plagues fell on a Sunday, with an early dinner, cold mutton, and extra pages of the Commentary, it was more than human nature could endure. At those rare times when Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had a cook,

she acted as if it were wrong for her to order dinner at home upon the seventh day. "Thou shalt do no manner of work." Aunt Jane thought it equally wrong to invite any one to her house on the Sabbath-day; but then we all know that excellent creature Catherine was no one!

If Uncle Sherbrook heard Aunt Jane say, "George, tell Thomas to lay another plate at dinner," he would exclaim, "Surely, Jane, no one is coming to dine on Sunday?" "No one, my dear Edward—no one! only Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart. Poor, dear, indefatigable creature! And she really does appreciate Dr MacShaw's admirable exposition of the Holy Scriptures! So she must stay on till after supper, that she may join in our family prayer and thanksgiving."

We had a tea-supper on Sunday at seven o'clock, and an early dinner, instead of lunch and late dinner. The Sunday bells rang at different hours from the week-day ones: we had no frightening-bell, only a dressing-bell and a supper-bell. Aunt Jane said she liked to make a difference between the Sabbath-day and the mere week-day, and Uncle Sherbrook thoroughly agreed with her.

Whenever Mrs Stewart dined at the Hall, she remained till after prayers. Had I not been intimately acquainted with this excellent person, I should have thought she came to prayers and not to dinner.

The third Sunday my mother and I spent at Sherbrook Hall was a wet day—an unsound Sabbath! for we could not get to church. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart

did not mind the rain, I am sorry to say, so came early, just as if it were fine. Besides the usual extra bit of Commentary, we had Dr MacShaw's sermons going on all day long. After the evening prayer, hymn, thanksgiving, and Commentary, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart took another cup of tea, and two more slices of bread-and-butter. At length, when the admirable Catherine bade us good-night, my mother was so tired that she yawned, and answered "Amen"! She was perfectly exhausted, and really did not know what she was saying. I had to help her up-stairs, so overcome was she with fatigue.

CHAPTER X.

My mother had never felt well since she came to Sherbrook Hall. She said she had a cold. The weather was damp and chilly, more like autumn than summer, and the house was a very cold one. Snipkins allowed no fires in August. From time to time my mother kept complaining of a pain through her chest and back.

"I know what it is, Sophia," my aunt invariably said; "it is the liver: and you have a pain just under your right shoulder?"

"No, Jane, it is more under the left one, and in my chest, low down; it takes away my breath."

"Exactly; I know! It has moved a little to the other side, but it will soon move back again, under the right shoulder, for it is just what I get myself."

I have rarely known Aunt Jane to be ill; yet no matter what symptoms of disease you may have, she is certain to have had precisely the same pains before. She is a perfectly infallible physician.

I was always frightened when my mother felt ill,

because I knew she had something wrong with her heart. I wanted her to let me send for the doctor, as there was really a very good one in Harefield. I thought he might order her to take the wine she had been accustomed to at home, and had been ordered to take, on account of the low action of her heart, but which Aunt Jane would not let her have. My aunt was a rigid teetotaller. She had actually taken the pledge; and because she herself had done so, she was firmly convinced all the world ought to do the same. She was infallible on the subject. Uncle Sherbrook had not taken the pledge. He drank wine in our house, but not in his own. Aunt Jane would not let him. She persuaded him it was his duty to set Harefield and his household a good example, for Aunt Jane said there was terrible drunkenness in the village. She also persuaded my uncle that abstinence from all fermented liquors was part of that water-cure by which she had been "the means, under Providence," of giving him a liver-complaint and restoring his constitution.

On those rarest of occasions when Uncle Sherbrook's household permitted him to ask a friend to dinner, I believe he took a glass of port, for good-manners' sake, after Aunt Jane had left the dining-room. He had some old sherry and some very old port in his cellar. He seemed to feel a certain pride in the age of these wines, especially in that of the old port. They were locked up in an inner cellar somewhere down-stairs—I don't know where; and the keys of this cellar, and

of the one outside it, were kept with the title-deeds of Uncle Sherbrook's property : at least I always believed so, but I never dared to ask my uncle the question. Aunt Jane did not know, for Uncle Sherbrook would not tell her, where he kept the keys. I think, perhaps, he feared she might tamper with the old port—throw out the poisonous fermentation, and put water in its place. The fear was not altogether unfounded, as Aunt Jane was a perfect zealot on the subject of fermented liquors and alcoholic drinks. To please her, the admirable Catherine only drank water, and said it agreed with her better than wine.

My mother had not sufficient courage to let me send for Dr Daly in spite of Aunt Jane. My aunt and the doctor were not on speaking terms : they had fought over an old woman who had died, and they had accused each other of killing her. By rights the old woman was Dr Daly's patient, he being the dispensary doctor, for there is a sort of dispensary in Harefield. Denis's father left a sum of money in his will to found one ; but it is badly supported. Aunt Jane will not subscribe to it : she says she does not see why Harefield should not be like other villages, and have no particular doctor to itself. My aunt thoroughly disapproves of Dr Daly's "system." Then she herself would like to treat the whole neighbourhood for liver-complaint, and Dr Daly has frequently interfered with her patients.

By the Tuesday after that last fatiguing Sabbath, my mother was somewhat but not much rested. She

said to me, "Sophy, I do not think this place quite agrees with me."

"Too much Commentary, punctuality, and tatting for your constitution, my love!" I replied.

"True enough, Sophy dear—quite true! but I could not leave without offending your Aunt Jane. We must stay our month. All we ~~could~~ do ~~would~~ be to cut off the last Sunday. We came here on a Monday, yesterday three weeks, so we might perhaps leave next Saturday. We will try and leave next Saturday, for it is very chilly here," and she drew her shawl about her.

We were sitting in the large drawing-room: windows opening to the ground are unsuited to our damp climate. The room was very cold. "I will light a fire," I said; "it is all nonsense dying of cold because an establishment is too well regulated."

"What would Snipkins say? and your uncle and aunt? Oh, Sophy, Sophy! I implore you, don't!" My mother rose hastily from the sofa, and caught my two hands in hers. "A fire in August! why, it is a revolution in this house! Sophy, oh, my dear child! I implore you, for my sake, not to make a fuss! I really do not feel well. A fuss would tire me, and I am ill and tired now. We will go away on Saturday, and light a fire at home. Come out, Sophy," and she tried gently to drag me from the fireplace—"come out, my dear, it is much warmer out of doors; it is not raining now, and the air will do me good."

I looked at her, and saw she was pale—paler than she had been for days. A sudden dread came over

me. My mother smiled. "Sophy," she said, "don't look like that, or you will make me think I am dying! But death, my dear, is not a little cold like mine."

"Death!" I repeated. The word somehow shocked me. "Death! oh, my love, don't let us talk of dying when we are so full of life!" I tenderly wrapped her shawl more closely around her, and said, "Come, love, —come out; come away from this cold, desolate room. I know you are not really ill, but it is no wonder that we talk of death when we sit here with those rows of empty chairs all standing stiffly in their cotton covers, like dead men in their winding-sheets."

The drawing-room at Sherbrook Hall was the most uncomfortable, punctiliously arranged room I ever saw in my life. The chairs were always wrapped in calico covers, and they stood in rows. The centre of desolation was a very ugly mahogany table, with one large straight leg. Tracty books, in coloured covers, with gilt edges, that nobody ever read, were placed at equal distances round this unsightly piece of furniture. Snipkins "hoverlooked" the "harranging" of the drawing-room, and "harranged" it as she thought best.

My mother and I went out, and took the path which led beside the garden-gate. We should have gone into the garden, but the gate was locked, so we sat on the lowest branch of the old beech-tree. We did not talk much. It was one of those still days in August, damp and sunless, when we notice there are leaves already on the ground, and feel that summer will soon be gone, and that winter then must come again.

After resting a little while, we followed the winding path down into the glen. The laurels were very wet from last night's rain. They looked like King Richard's dark villains trying to smother the white fog which lay under their boughs close to the ground. I do not care for laurels: they are too thick and gloomy, and shut out the light of heaven like wicked souls, and there is a strange damp smell hanging in the air wherever they grow. It felt so cold in the glen, that we did not go on to the path over the hill, but turned to our left, up the narrow gravel-walk which leads to Aunt Jane's own summer-house—a crockery-rockery-shell-and-pebble place, with a text of Scripture in small white stones over the entrance: "Enter ye in at the straight gate." This text always amused my mother and me. We began talking of Aunt Jane's want of the sense of the ridiculous, then of the sanctimonious Snipkins family, and so on to the Commentary and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart—all more or less amusing subjects for a pair of ladies to fall to gossiping about. My mother brightened up. I, seeing this, let fly my tongue and talked, . . . talked as if I had two people within me, and each person had two tongues. It would be hard to say how long we sat gossiping in the summer-house.

At last, as luck would have it, I began speaking of the Sherbrooks' endless bells—the warning-bell, the frightening-bell—and this made us think it might perhaps be near one o'clock. My mother found that by her watch it only wanted five minutes to the serious hour of lunch. I proposed taking a short cut home

over the grass: it was so closely mown that we could not have wet our feet. We were little more than a hundred yards from the house as the crow flies: going over the lawn was like stepping from the head to the tail of a partly coiled serpent, while the winding walk was like following every twist of the creature's body. But my poor mother had not the courage to dash across the grass in full sight of the dining-room windows.

She said—and nothing could be more true—“Jane and Edward would be seriously upset by a footprint on their well-kept lawn;” and then added, laughing, “I fancy they think Satan might walk up and down on the grass in front of the house if they were not particular about the right-of-way.” I was delighted to see my dear mother in good spirits again. She leant on my arm, and we set off, walking rather briskly down-hill to the glen; and when down one little hill, we went up the other perhaps too quickly, for my mother felt out of breath and coughed. She complained of a pain in her chest; yet she wanted to hurry on, fearing to be late: but I made her rest in the branches of the beech-tree by the garden-gate. “Punctuality will be the death of you!” I exclaimed, forcing her to obey me and sit down. I did not now feel alarmed by her weakness and cough, neither did she. When you have been talking in an energetic manner, your heart beats with such fulness of life that you think neither of danger nor dying.

My mother, lying back in the green boughs of the tree, rested some ten minutes at least. She soon re-

covered breath, and would have gone on quickly to the house,—only, finding it was past one o'clock, we both agreed that if we were sinners at all, we might as well be big as little ones. Being late, ten minutes later would make but slight difference in the heinousness of the great offence. We strolled home at our leisure, chatting as we went along. The under-gardener was rolling the lawn. My mother laughed quite heartily, and wondered whose footprints he was obliterating. We spoke of Uncle Sherbrook's right-of-way mania. "Do you suppose," said I, "if Uncle Sherbrook really did see the devil trespassing on his smooth turf, that he would send for Mr Buggle?" And we both agreed he would. My mother laughed at the idea till she got a fit of coughing. She said her cough came from nervousness. "Ah yes!" I exclaimed; "you feel you are now under the very eyes of the dining-room windows. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart sees us. She is telling Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook." My mother quite trembled. She was very much afraid of her brother-in-law.

"Follow me!" I cried. Perceiving one of the dining-room windows was not really closed, I pushed it open. We walked in. Aunt Jane gave a little scream; George Snipkins dropped a spoon, and Thomas upset the gravy-boat. Who before had ever been seen coming in through a window at Sherbrook Hall?

"We are late, I fear," said I; "but — but never mind, Aunt Jane."

"You never do seem to mind, Sophy—or Sophia

either. How late you are!" replied my aunt, querulously.

Uncle Sherbrook sat with his back to the window. He looked round at us steadily, severely. I felt uncomfortable under his gaze: he turned and went on eating in silence.

"Come, come!" cried Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, crossly; "I don't wonder your aunt and uncle are annoyed, / *Sophy.* Mrs Thursley, shut the window, and pray sit down. If you loiter any longer, there will be nothing left. I have nearly finished everything."

"So I see, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart," I said. I went near her, and added in a whisper, "*Bon appétit surtout! Renards n'en manquent point.*" In reply, the admirable Catherine threw daggers at me from her small black eyes.

"What is that, Sophy?" asked Aunt Jane; "for I am sure you are saying something very rude to Catherine."

"Only a French proverb," I answered.

"Oh yes, only a French proverb!" retorted my aunt. "I know indeed; something dreadful you learnt from that Mossiou Tolang! But my advice was never taken in that matter, or I will say you might have been very different from what you are. As to that Mossiou Tolang, now, Catherine, would you believe it? He is a French Papist, and"—&c., &c., &c., &c., &c., &c.—on she went. I did not listen.

It is a relief when you expect to be scolded for a particular fault, to find you only get a pointless reprimand.

mand for all your sins together, and it is better still when the reproving tongue takes a turn at finding fault with all the world. I was relieved to hear Aunt Jane reprove Monsieur Tolain instead of me. It did the little man no harm.

Uncle Sherbrook's awful silence had a great deal more effect on my nerves than Aunt Jane's scolding. If I am angry, I cannot hold my tongue, so I am exceedingly afraid of silent wrath. It is a power I feel unable to cope with. I know my mother was like me in this. She dreaded the bilious silence. My uncle looked at mamma, and pointed to the empty chair at his right hand. She took it, and began a trembling apology. Uncle Sherbrook silenced her by a wave of his hand and a shake of his head. He looked "No apology!"

My mother seemed quite unable to eat. She leant back, and I saw her turn pale as if in pain, and gasp for breath. I should have liked to give her some wine, for she seemed faint; but there was none, and my mother would never have forgiven me had I asked for some of Uncle Sherbrook's old port. The pain soon passed away, and my mother recovered her breath. "Edward, Edward," she said, "do not be angry." And I said to my uncle, "Her pain delayed us on our way home." Uncle Sherbrook ate on in silence.

"Her pain! What pain?" asked Aunt Jane, leaving her seat, and coming round to my mother's side: "That pain she has had so often of late in her chest and side," said I.

"Ah!" replied Aunt Jane, "I know; it is the liver. I often have a pain exactly like it myself. It is mere indigestion, and the pain is always worst under the right shoulder." My aunt said this with as perfect a conviction of her own infallibility as ever.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart quite agreed with Aunt Jane. "Believe me, Mrs Thursley," she said, "you have a mere indigestion. Don't dawdle about with Sophy, but go out by yourself, and take a good, quick walk. It is no use coddling one's self for a stitch in the side." I did not think much of Mrs Stewart's medical opinion, for I had had occasion once or twice before to remark that the best of women, though blessed with a constitution of iron, never liked any one to be petted or considered ill but herself. She was a jealous person, and liked to be first in all things.

As my mother did not care to eat, and her illness and Uncle Sherbrook's silence quite took away my appetite, grace was said just at the same time it would have been had we come home before the warning-bell. This return to punctuality somewhat appeased my uncle's wrath, for on leaving the dining-room he said to my mother, with a certain severity of manner, and yet not unkindly, "Perhaps, Sophia, if you are not well, you had better go to bed." And he passed on into his study.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart appeared to have changed her mind all of a sudden. Instead of continuing to recommend the good, quick walk, she strongly urged my mother to take Uncle Sherbrook's advice and go

to bed. I had reason to believe this excellent lady was anxious to get rid of us in one way or another, and did not much care how. Her own brown horse had fallen lame from weakness brought on by overstarvation. Mrs Stewart had walked from Riverbank—a long two miles—and now she wanted to get Aunt Jane and the carriage all to herself, for she liked tatting with her face to the horses. I remembered this was collecting Tuesday—a day on which the best of women visited some farmers' wives three miles off, preaching to them, and collecting sixpences for Lady Arabella's blacks, and butter and eggs for herself.

Mrs Stewart wanted Aunt Jane to start immediately, but my aunt would not do so until she had put my mother to bed herself. Robert Jones and the horses were actually kept waiting ten minutes at the door. My aunt was thus delayed, because she insisted on winding a cold wet bandage round her sister's waist, bringing it exactly underneath the right shoulder where the pain ought to be, and would be soon again.

I found my mother shivering, and yet in vain did I beg her to let me take off the cold bandage. "No, no, Sophy," she said; "when your aunt comes in, she will only put it on again, and I have not the energy to argue with her. She talks so much, and I like to be quiet. Put my fur cloak on my bed, and perhaps I may go to sleep."

Such lethargy alarmed me, and I thought it a sad misfortune for a yielding invalid to fall into the hands

of an infallible doctor. "At all events, I will light a fire," said I.

"No, no!" cried my mother, raising herself in bed; "not without your Aunt Jane's leave. What would Snipkins say?"

I slipped from the room while my mother was still speaking, and running down-stairs, found the carriage had started. There it was, creeping along the avenue. I ran across the grass and overtook it. Aunt Jane's head came popping out of one window, exclaiming, "Why, there's Sophy! Shocking, disobedient girl! She has run across the grass! Stop, Robert, while I speak to her!" I heard Mrs Stewart's penetrating voice say inside the carriage, "She does not mind what you say to her, Mrs Sherbrook; make her uncle reprove her, I advise you."

"Stop, Robert, stop!" cried I, for he had not minded Aunt Jane. Robert pulled up and turned upon me a look of amazement. So did Thomas. Even the horses turned round their heads and looked. They were not in the habit of stopping on this part of the avenue.

"What is it? what is it?" seemed to burst from carriage, horses, ladies, servants, all in one breath. "What is it?"

"May I light a fire in my mother's room?" I heard Thomas repeating my words to Robert on the box, and the coachman grumbling in return, "'Ad I knowed it was only that, I would not 'ave stopped on this 'ere 'ill." "Really, Sophy," said Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, "if

that is all you have to say, you might have come round by the avenue, and not have walked upon the grass. Mr Sherbrook will be much displeased."

"But may I light the fire, Aunt Jane? Answer quickly, quickly! or I will light it without leave," cried I, out of all patience.

"What impertinence!" said Mrs Stewart.

"Child! child!" exclaimed my aunt; "what will become of you?" And she put up her hands at me like a deprecating saint. The window was down. I seized one hand and held it tightly so as to rivet her attention.

"May I, or may I not, light a fire?"

"In the month of August?"

"My mother is ill."

"A mere indigestion," put in Mrs Stewart. I pressed my aunt's hand in mine.

"Think, think, Aunt Jane, before you say no!"

"What will Snipkins say?" cried my aunt.

"Snipkins!" I repeated, in a voice of scorn. I believe I gave poor Aunt Jane's hand a violent squeeze, just as if I had had Snipkins under my thumb. She screamed and called out, "Dreadful, headstrong child! Go away and do what you like; only you must ask Snipkins if you may tell Elizabeth to tell Maria to light the fire. Now mind you ask Snipkins first! Do you hear? Sophy, do you hear?"

I was quite determined to hear no more, so I took to my heels and ran back across the grass. "Come off the grass! come off the grass!" kept ringing in the

air behind me. When I got to a safe distance I looked back, and saw my aunt's head out of one window, and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's out of the other. I should say both ladies were talking, for Thomas appeared to be laughing heartily.

I laughed too, and for the moment I laughed away all anxiety. Such a fuss about nothing! Little things were certainly not little things at Sherbrook Hall! I nearly tumbled over two crows in front of the house: they were so accustomed to have the grass plat all to themselves, that they would not get out of my way till the very last instant, and then off they flew with a loud caw. Two well-regulated crows! Just like the two Sherbrooks! They cawed at a novelty, and trespassers were an abomination to their soul!

Snipkins had come to Sherbrook Hall a very long time ago as Aunt Jane's own maid. She had grown imperceptibly into a sort of housekeeper: she kept the keys, peeped into every room, and was to be met all over the house. Her time was fully occupied in fussing, interfering, and talking. Satan finds no mischief for such hands to do, because he sees they find quite enough for themselves without his help. Snipkins was a cunning gossip: her great command of Scriptural language made her conversation acceptable to Aunt Jane, notwithstanding her aspiring tongue. Often and often have I been told it would be well for me if I had the Bible at my finger-ends like Snipkins. This very superior person could even talk

gossip in a way that was not scandalous, but devout. Had you only leant one ear to her tales, you might have thought she was discussing the domestic affairs of Abraham and Sarah.

When first Snipkins came to Aunt Jane, I know she arrived alone, and with little luggage but the letter *h* and some texts of Scripture. Before long she managed to fill the house and place with her relations. The whole Snipkins family, even the nieces and cousins, were very pious people. Aunt Jane often told me how fortunate she was, under Providence, in getting a maid to whom high wages were no attraction.

"Sophy," said my aunt, constantly, "when I hired Snipkins, she told me she did not care for my high wages, but that she would come to me for the good of her soul, as she heard I kept a Christian household; and it was very pleasant to me to hear this."

I believe the lady's-maid's numerous relations also came to Sherbrook Hall for the good of their souls.

I ran up-stairs to Aunt Jane's dressing-room, so that I might discover Snipkins's whereabouts from her niece. As the very superior person had no time to spare, her niece Harriet "helped," and kept Aunt Jane's "things in order." Nieces were an institution at Sherbrook Hall. There was a Maria besides Harriet. Maria was helping-niece to Elizabeth Snipkins the house-maid, and Elizabeth herself was the widow of a poor relation of Aunt Jane's own maid. The nieces arrived early in the morning; at night, Harriet went home to the front lodge, and Maria to the back gate. Snipkins's

sister, Emma, the cook, did not make use of a niece. She had a kitchen-maid and her share of the "general helper" instead. These drudges had real work to do, so they did not belong to the ruling family.

George Snipkins, the butler (a perfectly invaluable man, and so punctual!), possessed an invisible underling—a boy hardly ever to be seen, because he did not wear livery. This invisible underground Bill "helped," and cleaned the plate when Thomas went out with the carriage. Harriet generally knew where her aunt could be found. Snipkins, it appeared, was in the housekeeper's room down-stairs at dinner with the chief priests of her tribe. Harriet positively gasped with fright when I asked her to go and tell Snipkins to have a fire lighted in my mother's room.

"Lor, Miss Sophy! Lor!" she exclaimed, in a piteous voice; "there's nothing I would not do for you, but Lor! Miss Sophy, don't hask me to disturb Miss Snipkins at her dinner."

"There, there, Harriet!" I said; "don't cry and be silly. I will tell Snipkins myself. Will she be sure to have the keys of the coal-cellar?"

"Yes, miss; but——"

"But what?"

"I fear there'll be none but cook's coals in the cellar."

"Any coals will do."

"Lor, Miss Sophy, whatever will Miss Hemmer say? Mrs Helizabeth won't dare to touch Miss Hemmer's coals!"

"Miss Hemmer! Mrs Helizabeth! Stuff and nonsense!" cried I, and off I ran.

Snipkins was very angry at being disturbed at her dinner,—the more so, perhaps, as she happened to be entertaining some friends, and she may not have liked my seeing the strangers, followers being strictly forbidden in Uncle Sherbrook's household.

When Snipkins heard Aunt Jane had given leave for a fire to be lighted in my mother's room, she was filled with righteous indignation.

"Mrs Sherbrook's leave his nothing, Miss Sophia Thursley. Hit is Mrs Sherbrook's personal hundoubted horders I must 'ave. Hit is not for you, Miss Sophia, to be ha-getting hof Mrs Sherbrook's horders, and ha-dividing of a 'ouse hagaint hitself. A 'ouse divided hagaint hitself cannot stand."

Snipkins's air of dignified pomposity caricatured Annt Jane's. The maid imitated her mistress in many little ways. She wore a set of brown ringlets at each side of her sanctimonious face, and a twist of hair behind, with falling white lappets of elaborate crochet. When my aunt went into mourning, Snipkins put on a black dress; at other times she wore a brown shot-silk made after one of Madame Julie's patterns. She was stout and florid, and looked so very sleek and comfortable, that had you merely passed her in the hall or on the stairs, you might have exclaimed, "What a motherly good-natured sort of woman!"

"Fires in Horgus," continued Snipkins, "hare contrary to the rules hof this hestablishment, and rules

hare the principle, the rock, which I huphold, Miss Thursley."

"Snipkins," I asked, "is it you who are to give Mrs Sherbrook orders? or is it Mrs Sherbrook who is to give her orders to you?" The goodly-godly woman got very angry.

"Hi'll hanswer no himpertinent questions, Miss Sophia Thursley, and hif you give me hany himpertience——"

"Snipkins!" I said.

"Yes, Miss Sophia, call me what bad names you like, but hi'll complain you to your aunt. Mrs Sherbrook knows right well as 'ow you're not hagoing hin hat the straight and narrer gate which leads to leverlasting salvation. Hoften and hoften 'as your haunt sat down and bemoaned your backslidings to me, Miss Sophia!"

I was sure this was quite true, so I did not vouchsafe a reply, but turned to Elizabeth, the housemaid, and asked her to have the fire lighted for me, and quickly, as my mother was ill. Elizabeth pushed out her chair and got up.

"Who dares hupset the harrangements hof my 'ousehold?" screamed Snipkins. "Helizabeth, if you 'go ha-follering hof Miss Thursley's horders, who 'as no right to give hany, hi'll just 'ave you and your trunk packed off h afore morning."

The housemaid wavered.

"Hi'll just tell Mrs Sherbrook," continued Snipkins, "'ow ha respectable widder like yourself went ha-

visiting last Sabbath hevening contrary to Mr Sherbrook's very most partikler horders. . . ."

"Miss Snipkins, Miss Snipkins! don't ruin me!" gasped Elizabeth, and sat down again. The housemaid's abject fear astonished me.

The end of it all was, that I went into the kitchen myself, found three maids there, told them all to look the other way, and seizing the coal-scuttle, dragged it as best I could up-stairs. I stopped at the top of the back-stairs, for I heard a noise in my uncle's dressing-room, and his own voice calling for his portmanteau. I peeped cautiously, saw no one coming, so slipped across the passage, and smuggled the coal-scuttle into my mother's room without any unpleasant adventure.

My mother's terror at seeing the coal-scuttle in my hand was so great that she would hardly let me light the fire. She declared she was quite well, and did not want a fire. I lighted it all the same. My mother would have died of cold sooner than brave Snipkins. She feared the tyrant who had supreme power over Aunt Jane, because she knew by experience what a misery this superior person could make life to you at Sherbrook Hall. Snipkins did not wish Aunt Jane to have people staying in the house, so took good care to make them uncomfortable. I think she particularly disliked relations—fearing, perhaps, they might become fixtures, "for hever hinterfering and ha-bringing hof strange maids hamongst people who does not want none of their hairs." Though Aunt Jane always

brought Snipkins to our house, we dared not take a maid to hers. We once took an unfortunate Fanny to Sherbrook Hall; and when we went away, this poor girl's character was left behind, and she never got it back again. Snipkins accused her of every crime under the sun, from pilfering to walking on the county road with a soldier upon the Sabbath-day.

"Sophy," said my mother, "write home, and say we shall leave this on Saturday, and by the early train. The earlier the better. And mind, Sophy, my dear, you write immediately, or your aunt will come in and shut the post-bag; you know she always will shut it half an hour too soon."

I ran off down to the library, where there was an old table in a corner, on which people like Sophy were allowed to write. A spot of ink in my own room or in the drawing-room was a capital offence.

On my way through the hall, I met George Snipkins's underground helper carrying a portmanteau.

"A portmanteau!" I cried, all astonishment. "Good heavens! what can be the matter?"

"Master," said the boy, grinning from ear to ear—"master's bin and forgot he was to dine with them 'lectioneering gentlemen this very night in Votlingham, and when the mistress gets out of the carriage, master's to get in, and the mistress she don't know it, nor Mr Jones neither."

"What! not even know it? And they have not come in! I hope they will be late. What delightful excitement!" cried I.

"The master, miss, is a-drinking ~~of~~ a cup of coffee in the study."

"Taking coffee in the study!" I repeated, almost with a scream. "Heavens! and without a warning-bell!"

There were sounds all through the dull house—a noise of living, talking people. "This is delightful," thought I.

I heard Snipkins calling out to Harriet to get a label for Mr Sherbrook's portmanteau, and Elizabeth giving orders over the banister to Maria to tell Bill to bring back the portmanteau, as George had forgotten to put in Mr Sherbrook's evening shoes.

When I had written my letter, and went to put it in the post-bag, I found Uncle Sherbrook pacing up and down the outer hall, all coated and hatted, and looking at the watch he held open in his hand. I thought, should I speak to him? No; I thought I had better not. He is put out at having forgotten this dinner. An infallible should not forget. I see he is angry—I meant to say, bilious; it was a slip of the tongue—for, as I well knew, Uncle Sherbrook had never been angry since the day he married Aunt Jane.

I took down the post-bag unobserved, and was replacing it on its own particular shelf, when my uncle chanced to look up from his watch and see me.

"Sophy," he exclaimed, testily, "don't speak to me; you will fuss me. I never get into a fuss myself; but when you come running after me and mislaying every-

thing belonging to me, I declare I almost feel as if I might lose my temper."

Uncle Sherbrook had his fits of bilious talking as well as his fits of bilious silence.

He kept on talking, and saying ladies were all alike, and always fussy, and always losing everything. "And I am sure I have never travelled with your aunt that she did not lose my little black bag—as if she had anything to say to that bag, when she has her own hand-bag, and her brown shawl, and her umbrella!—but no! she must come fussing about my black bag; and Snipkins . . . even Snipkins fusses me! Now, now, Sophy, run away. I can't have you fussing me; I can't stand it. I am going to Vottingham on important election business. I may have to make a speech, and I don't want my mind disturbed."

I was scampering away as quickly as I could go, but I had not got half-way up-stairs before my uncle called me back in a stentorian voice.

"Take this key to George instantly—instantly! Do you hear, Sophy? Tell him I gave the wrong key. This is the right one. See that he locks the portmanteau, and then bring the key back to me—to me! Do you hear?—to me!"

"Yes, yes, Uncle Sherbrook—yes!"

He shouted after me, "Sophy, don't lose the key! don't lose the key!"

When I returned, my uncle was in his study. He sent me flying off to underground Bill with a message

for Mr Buggle—a most important one, which was to be despatched immediately, immediately!

“And mind, do not loiter, Sophy. I wish to know the exact moment you give the letter and William starts.”

When I came back again, I was told to run down the avenue and see if the carriage were in sight; and if I met it, I was to tell Robert to drive up to the house quickly, quickly! I hastened to obey, delighted to escape from my uncle.

I had run a hundred yards, but not on the grass, when I heard his voice calling loudly after me. He stood on the door-step, waving Aunt Jane's garden-hat. I had not the courage to pretend I was deaf, so I was forced to hear and run back to the house. I was quite out of breath.

“Sophy,” said my uncle, impatiently, “how slow you are! You would irritate any one. Put on this hat; for if you do not meet the carriage on the avenue, you may find it in the village at Smith's shop. Your aunt always keeps the carriage waiting outside that shop, and the bay mare caught her last bad cold there.”

Uncle Sherbrook stuck the hat on my head. Such a hat! with a border in front and big strings.

“What are you standing there for, Sophy? Run away this moment, and leave me in peace. I never was more fussed in my life—not even by your aunt and Snipkins.”

The front avenue at Sherbrook Hall is fully a mile

foot-
that
long. When I got to the gate, I saw the carriage outside coming towards me at a foot-pace. I rejoiced to think I should not have to walk through the village in Aunt Jane's garden-hat. I beckoned to the coachman, hoping to hurry him, but without effect. Robert was walking the horses up the Simplon. My mother and I had given ~~the~~ name to one of Robert's hills, an almost imperceptible rise in the ground about fifty yards from the lodge. The horses knew the Simplon.

The carrier-pigeon's life I had led the last two hours, flying about with messages, had tired me out. I felt no inclination to argue with Aunt Jane, and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart might have insulted me with impunity.

Sophy standing all alone at the lodge-gate caused a burst of astonishment. "What is she doing? Where is she going to all alone at this hour? The dressing-bell will ring before she is back at the house. And my garden-hat on her head!—and if she has not crumpled the border and nearly torn out one string! What will the headstrong girl do next?"

"Whatever she ought not to do, Mrs Sherbrook."

I let the two ladies talk away their first excitement. At length they perceived I was silent, and bade me speak. I told my errand in few words, and desired Robert to drive home quickly. The carriage drove off—a buzz of excitement inside and outside. Can horses who have gone six miles go six miles more if the coachman did not know beforehand the master was going to dine in Votlingham? Can the infallible wife of an infallible man believe she or her husband could

forget the day of an election dinner? Accidents were so unusual at Sherbrook Hall that an unforeseen event was like Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*—a revolution in the realm! Oh, how great are little things to little minds in little places!

I had the pleasure of being too late for my uncle's departure. Uncle Sherbrook and Mrs Stewart passed me on the avenue. They drove quickly, but not too quickly for me to catch the words, "Sophy's footsteps on the lawn." Who could mistake the admirable Catherine's voice?

As I drew near the house, Aunt Jane stood on the gravel-sweep shading her eyes with her hand and watching the carriage. When it reached the turn in the avenue, Aunt Jane ambled forwards like an ancient pony, and stood on the grass, so that her eyes might follow it round the corner. I remained on the gravel. I could hear my aunt lamenting aloud that Edward had not ordered his bed beforehand at the Votlingham Hotel, and wondering if he would catch his death of cold.

"My dear Aunt Jane," said I, "you are far more likely to catch cold than he, for your feet are wet. I am sure they are wet, standing on that dreadful grass."

My aunt looked down at her boots, and realised that she stood upon the well-kept lawn. She looked back at me and blushed—actually blushed! And she was not like my mother; she hardly ever blushed.

I saw her conscience reproached her severely; so I turned away to hide a smile, and walking to the

house, I left this great sinner to grapple alone with her remorse and repent in private. Well, thought I, at any rate there is one comfort—she will soon again become infallible and without reproach.

When I told my mother that my uncle and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had gone away, and were not coming back, she felt so very much better that she insisted on getting up. She said Snipkins hated people to stay in bed, as it gave trouble. However, she was not strong enough to come down to dinner; for when she tried to walk down-stairs, she felt so ill and weak that she had to go back to her room again.

Both Aunt Jane and I were late for dinner. “How odd!” we exclaimed, almost in one breath; “why, we must have mistaken the frightening-bell for the dressing-bell.” Aunt Jane made a sort of apology which seemed to be addressed to me, but which in reality was intended for George Snipkins. My aunt certainly did feel very much afraid of her servants. Our unpunctuality had annoyed the butler.

After dinner, I proposed we should sit round the fire in my mother’s room and have the tea brought up-stairs. This was a new doctrine, and a hard one for Aunt Jane to receive. The possibility of not taking tea in the drawing-room after dinner had never occurred to her. At last I persuaded her to do this new and startling thing. I never should have succeeded had not the regularity of my aunt’s mind been disturbed by the unlooked-for event of the day. There was Edward dining at Votlingham, when this time

last night he had fully expected to be dining at home. What an upset to a well-regulated mind !

I carried the tea-table myself up-stairs from the drawing-room. I was almost tempted to take a much lighter table there was in the study, but I feared the shock might be too much for my aunt's nerves. Had I displaced anything in the sacred room, she might have thought me capable of making away with the "title-deeds," or of burning my uncle's will—or rather, I should say, wills ; for I believe there were always two or three wills in the study. I know my uncle was fond of making his will ; and a suitable and lively pastime it was for a man of his nature, and with his taste for attorneys and the law.

We poked up the fire, drew in our chairs, drank hot tea, and warmed our feet quite comfortably. Aunt Jane was very lively for her ; the exciting events of the day had raised her circulation. My aunt loved a change, though she did not know it ; on the contrary, she bemoaned our sad loneliness, and imagined herself to be in low spirits.

"Poor dear Edward, how lonely we are without him ! And how unfortunate that Catherine's horse should be laid up at present ! Edward was to drop her at Riverbank on his way. He will keep the carriage at Vottingham, and return in it himself, as Robert knows of a good stable quite near the hotel where he can put up the horses ; so we shall not see Catherine till we can send her home again, because she cannot walk both ways, for it is really too much for her. But

whatever will she do? And without a cook! Poor, dear, excellent, indefatigable creature!"

Neither my mother nor I could pretend to be unhappy. My mother brightened up and seemed to feel at her ease. There was no bilious silence to make her awkward, or Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart to irritate her nerves. It is only when you have been domesticated with superfluous energy, a rasping voice, and a tatting-shuttle, that you can understand the joy you would feel at being unexpectedly relieved of a woman who was tatting a steeple, and collecting for thirteen charitable associations as well.

I never knew Aunt Jane cast so little bread upon the waters, or give forth so few words in season. My mother's one sin during the day had been unpunctuality, and my two, unpunctuality and treading on the grass. Now, luckily for us, Aunt Jane had walked upon the lawn, and mistaken the frightening-bell for the dressing-bell. And then, did not my aunt look forward to a rare treat when the clock should strike ten? Would not she be sole officiating divine this night? Would not she have the Commentary all to herself? and what was to prevent her from reading the servants two hymns if she wished? She knew Snipkins thought she read them "ha-most beautiful." Aunt Jane was in great good-humour.

Yet I do not mean to say we nestled together like three sweet doves cooing in unison. My aunt could not talk to her sister without "arguing." She hoped the Conservative candidate would be returned for the

county, and she prophesied that if the Radicals got a majority in the next Parliament, England would be a province of Rome in ten years' time. When my mother had drunk some hot tea, she felt lively enough to prophesy against Rome and in favour of the Protestant religion and Liberal party.

The fire became very low during Aunt Jane's longest prophecy; and so pleased was my aunt with her own political and prophetic sagacity, that she actually gave mamma leave to ring for more coals. No one answered the bell. This did not astonish me. Aunt Jane did not propose that we should ring again. She made no remark when I took up the coal-scuttle and walked out of the room.

This time I went straight to the kitchen, avoiding the passage which led to the housekeeper's room. Imagine my disgust to find the kitchen-fire raked out, the large and small scuttles empty, and not a piece of coal to be seen anywhere! The kitchen-maid came in from the scullery. She called out, "Miss Hemmer! Miss Hemmer!" to see if the cook happened to be anywhere near. Getting no answer, she walked close up to me and whispered in my ear, as if we had been surrounded by listeners, "Miss Snipkins has been and locked up Miss Hemmer's coals in the cellar, and has taken the key in her pocket down to the front lodge." I inquired when she would return. "Lor, Miss Sophy! she won't be back this night. She is a-going to stay with Mr Francis at the lodge till morning. They are to have a black gentleman, and

cheese macaroni—for I saw Miss Hemmer making it—and prayers, and” . . . the kitchen-maid looked round and lowered her voice still more . . . “and beer.” The Snipkins family were supposed to be rigid teetotallers.

I went in search of William, the underground boy. No power of persuasion, not even a half-crown, could induce him to take a message to Snipkins at the front lodge.

I returned to my mother’s room empty-handed. Aunt Jane was surprised to hear Snipkins had gone to meet a black gentleman and spend the night at the lodge. As I did not wish to make unnecessary mischief, I kept silence on the subject of the macaroni and the beer. My aunt seemed annoyed to find her maid was spending the night abroad without even having gone through the form of asking leave. But on second thoughts, she came to the conclusion that the negro missionary—“I am sure, Sophy, he is a missionary”—had arrived unexpectedly in the village; “and Snipkins, I daresay, received a message from her brother while we were in the dining-room; and Snipkins is so thoughtful, she never would interrupt me at dinner; and indeed, I am very glad Snipkins went—she has a good memory, and will be able to tell me what the missionary said. I must say James Sherbrook is remiss in many ways, for as rector of the parish he should have inquired about this African wanderer; and I am sure Catherine would have helped him to organise a lecture in the schoolroom.”

"Yes, I am sure she would," said I; "but I think the Reverend James likes organising his own affairs himself."

"Sophy, Sophy!" exclaimed my aunt; "a parish is a vineyard in which many should labour, for many are called: but really I can argue with you no longer, because I must go down-stairs immediately and prepare the books for prayers; but you need not follow me till five minutes to ten."

As I fully intended to skip the Commentary, I ignored this last remark. I tried, but in vain, to bring my aunt back to coal-scuttles and Snipkins. I followed her all along the lobby, begging her to send George for the key of the coal-cellar. The only answer I could get was, "I daresay Snipkins disapproves of your having a fire on the 30th of August; and I think she is right, because if you insist on keeping Sophia too warm, she will certainly catch fresh cold when she goes out again, for too much heat always makes one delicate. Sophia had better go to bed, and I will come and put on her bandages after prayers."

"You will kill her, Aunt Jane," I said—"you will kill her with those dripping bandages."

"Child, child! did not I cure her in one night when she got that sudden attack rather more than a year ago? though I will allow I was alarmed then, for she had every symptom of severe internal inflammation."

"Not a bit of it, Aunt Jane!" I cried. "All imagination! She was perfectly well—never was better in her life!"

I told Aunt Jane we had played a trick upon her—that mamma had gone to bed that time, because she was afraid of meeting her and my uncle at dinner, after having run away from the Tuttertons'. Aunt Jane said she could believe anything of us both, especially of me, but that nothing I or any one else could say would ever make her believe the symptoms of disease were the symptoms of good health. She had been the means employed, under Providence, to cure my mother of severe internal inflammation, of aggravated indigestion, and she had done so entirely by the judicious application of the cold compress. Great doctors like my aunt never cure any but mortal maladies.

Aunt Jane's tongue was now set going in a hopeless manner. She turned round on each step of the stairs and described how she and her wet bandages had delivered "Edward's" mortal coil from the most terrible disorders. I may truly say there was a deathbed to every three steps of the staircase. Had I believed but half Aunt Jane said, I should have thought Uncle Sherbrook had died at least six times, and been brought to life again by a wet bandage on the day of his funeral.

My aunt talked on, on, on. I leant over the banisters and talked too. I thought if Aunt Jane took a long breath she would hear me speaking, and would listen, and I would seize the opportunity and turn her thoughts away from doctoring and wet bandages. But I verily believe she never drew

breath until she was seated in the drawing-room. Indeed she may even then have continued talking to herself. As I did not follow her down-stairs, how do I know she held her tongue?

I need hardly add that Aunt Jane gained her point. She positively refused to go to bed until she had wrapped her sister in wet bandages.

CHAPTER XI.

THE night of this 30th of August was one of the coldest ever known for the time of year. There had been thunderstorms all over the country; heavy rain fell at midnight. My mother awoke coughing violently, and awoke me in the chill of the early morning. It was light enough for me to notice the burning colour on her cheek. She complained of a pain like a dagger stabbing through her chest and back. She sat up in bed and leant her head against my shoulder. I saw with horror that her handkerchief was spotted with blood—dark clotted blood. I felt her hands; they were burning, and yet she shivered. I took off those wet bandages and threw them to the other end of the room. Aunt Jane did not know how to put them on properly. The very sheets and blankets were wet.

“Sophy,” said my mother, “I feel there is inflammation in my chest. I know we can find no remedies in this house;” and these words set her coughing again.

“You are spitting blood!” cried I.

"A doctor! Send for Dr Daly!" she gasped, and fell back exhausted.

I dressed in trembling haste. My mother lay with her eyes closed. She opened them and said, "I am better, dear child—I am better now. Do not awake your aunt. I will sleep while you are gone." She coughed again, but not much; the violence of the fit seemed past.

"Sleep, and you will soon again be well, my love," I said—"well before this day is over." But my voice sounded strange in my own ear, as if my words were unreal—as if they lied and I knew it.

I went out of the room, and stopped and listened at the door to the loud breathing within. I hesitated to leave my mother alone. Would to God I could send a messenger! I knew George Snipkins was not good-natured; besides, he would refuse to go for Dr Daly without an express order from Aunt Jane: and if a Snipkins would not go, who else would dare? I foresaw that hours might be lost.

On going down-stairs I found every door locked, so I opened one of the drawing-room windows and went out upon the lawn. It was no longer raining, and the sun was breaking through the morning mist. I had never been out at this fresh hour before. For one short instant I stood still, struck by the beauty of the early morning. The hill and the more distant trees were still shrouded in a blue haze. The leaves hung heavy with rain upon the boughs, like the wet eyelashes of the mourner who has wept himself to sleep the night before. There is a moment, half sleep, half

wakefulness, when the eyes seem dreaming on beneath the opening lids; and there is an hour of stillness, half of dream, when the summer day awakes after a rainy, troubled night,—when there is a sort of hush, of lullaby—a warbling of birds, a long-breathed sigh awaking into life and song. It was but for a moment that I stopped, and then walked on as if deaf and blind; and then ran, thinking I was not going fast enough.

I feared I should never arouse them at the lodge. At last the astonished Harriet opened the door. I was determined to get the house-keys from Snipkins. Harriet, whispering, bade me go into the parlour. There I found Aunt Jane's maid snoring in a chair, her dress all tumbled, her curls dishevelled, and her crochet lappets lying on the floor. The table was strewn with black bottles and glasses, some standing, some upset. I recollect one half-empty glass fell upon the ground, and the contents bespattered my dress. The smell of beer was sickening. Coming in from the open air this close den seemed to me like a plague-spot on this beautiful world.

Snipkins's face was flushed, and she slept heavily. I found it impossible to awake her. I even shook her, though there was something about the woman which made me shrink from touching her. At length I lost patience; so putting my hand into her pocket I took out the keys, and with them I pulled out two letters. As I put back the letters, I remember noticing one was directed to Uncle Sherbrook, and the other to Aunt Jane.

It was not till long afterwards that it struck me I had tried to awaken Snipkins from a drunken sleep.

I ran on through the sleeping village to the doctor's house. When I had rung and knocked, and waited what seemed to me an endless time, Dr Daly himself opened the dispensary door. He was so amazed at seeing me that he did not speak.

"Oh, doctor," said I, "come with me quickly! She is dying."

With an effort Dr Daly recovered his voice. "Miss Thursley from the Hall! Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "is it Mrs Sherbrook who is ill? Has she killed herself, and then sent for me?"

"No, no," said I; "it is my mother, and she is dying." I caught hold of Dr Daly's arm, "Come—I tell you to come! Don't mind Aunt Jane or the old woman you fought about. Doctor, if you will not come quickly, my mother may be dead!"

The kind old man drew me to a chair and made me sit down.

"My dear young lady," said he, "it is you who look almost dying, because you have run too fast. You must rest. Do not be alarmed, my dear young friend; I have no doubt a little proper treatment would set Mrs Thursley quite to rights. Doubtless your aunt, Mrs Sherbrook, has already undertaken the case? Eh?"

"She has."

"And failed! Just so—just so! Mrs Sherbrook is

perhaps a little too confident in her own curative powers. Mrs Sherbrook is a theorist."

Dr Daly sat down opposite me and rubbed his hands with an air of infinite satisfaction, as if there was no such thing as hurry in this world—as if death were an easy-going old gentleman, who took his time and killed men at his leisure.

"I doubt if Mrs Sherbrook will permit me to attend a patient in her house," continued he. "May I ask, Miss Thursley" . . . and he rubbed his hands still more slowly . . . "may I ask, before I make up my mind to undertake the case, what is the nature of Mrs Thursley's attack?"

"Inflammation of the lungs," I replied.

"Gently, gently, my dear young lady—gently! Let us rather say a severe cold. I am aware Mrs Sherbrook invariably exaggerates the gravity of an attack, but perhaps more so when the liver is affected than the lungs: still, she exaggerates. We will not imagine the worst until we have used the stethoscope. The stethoscope will enlighten us. Till then, let us say a severe cold."

I seemed to have my poor mother's face of pain before me. I remembered vividly her state and recovered strength.

"Doctor," I cried, starting up, "call the illness by what name you will, I tell you it may be death which is coming to my mother, and may have come while you were sitting there rubbing your hands and making up your mind. Doctor, you madden me! for you,

at least, should believe in danger and dying if others cannot. I will go if you will not!" And so saying, I rushed through the open door into the street.

Dr Daly ran after me, calling out, "Wait, my dear young lady—wait! I'll harness the grey horse and bring him round in five minutes."

I had waited long enough. "No, no!" I cried to him; "overtake me if you will, I can wait no longer." And I ran on, but kept looking back, hoping to see the doctor's gig.

There was another delay at the avenue gate. Harriet had locked it after me; it was she who opened it again. I suppose the rest of the family were sleeping hard like Snipkins.

"Harriet," said I, "keep that gate open. The doctor's gig will come through in a moment."

Harriet screamed—"Dr Daly's gig! Oh, Miss Sophy, Mrs Thursley must be ha-dying!"

Dying! It was the first time I had heard any voice but my own say that stabbing word. "Dying!" I repeated—"dying! Harriet, who told you she was dying? How dare you say that word to me? How dare you, cruel, heartless girl? Do you want to kill me?" I know I turned from the poor girl in a fury, and ran as if I had fled from death itself and could outrun it.

At the turn of the avenue in sight of the house, I stopped and listened. I heard the sound of wheels and of a trotting horse. When I saw the old doctor's gig appear, a ray of hope entered my heart, like a

ray of the sunshine around me ; and I thought, perhaps there is time—there may be no real danger yet.

Dr Daly saw me, and called out to me to stop ! stop ! and he would pick me up. Whipping on the horse, he overtook me and bade me climb into the seat beside him. The little man was very cheery. “Fine morning, Miss Thursley—fine morning !”

It is strange how doctors so often have that unnaturally cheerful manner. His liveliness jarred with my present mood, so I did not pay much attention to what he said. I only remember it struck me he was pleased at being called in suddenly to attend Aunt Jane’s own sister at Sherbrook Hall.

We entered by the still open drawing-room window. The old horse could be trusted to stand alone. Dr Daly came into the drawing-room, speaking as if he were talking to the calico-covered chairs.

“Should have a fire here : very cold ! very cold !” He put his hand in his pocket. “Stethoscope—quite right. Blister, plaster—quite right. I always take such things about with me, in case, my dear young lady—in case they may be wanted.” I led the way across the hall up-stairs.

“Mrs Sherbrook,” continued the doctor, cheerily, “will not approve of the blister ; she will object to it. Mrs Sherbrook will most decidedly object ! But I will tell her, I will tell her plainly, as I have undertaken the case, I insist upon her leaving the treatment to me. I will say—Mrs Sherbrook, excuse me, excuse me, but I insist upon prescribing for this case as I

think fit! We differ, Mrs Sherbrook—we differ. We differ on all subjects. You never light a fire in August. I light one whenever I feel cold. I shall order a fire to be immediately lighted in the patient's room. We differ, Mrs Sherbrook—we differ."

"Hush!" said I to the garrulous old man—"hush! and listen before we go in."

My mother's breathing had grown louder while I had been away. The sound was unlike any other I had ever heard before. "Listen, doctor—listen!" I watched him eagerly. His countenance fell. I did not know till that instant how much I had expected good news. I grasped the doctor's arm.

"There is hope?" I said; "she cannot die? Have pity, have pity, and tell me she cannot die?"

From this moment Dr Daly was a changed man. He said, "While there is life there is hope." He paused, and added almost severely, "At a time like this, it is our duty to be calm." He shook off my grasp and opened the door.

My mother, hearing our voices outside, had raised herself in bed, and leant her arm upon the pillow. "You are come at last," she said, in a thick, hoarse voice—"at last! at last! It is good of you, doctor, to come; and good of her to bring you." My mother ever thought any little thing I did for her most kind.

"Sophy, come here! Sophy . . ."

But her voice failed her. She cast such a look of yearning love upon me, that my heart stood still, and I

turned cold, and trembled in the great struggle to drive back the cowardly tears which choked me. The smothered sob stifled me; I could not speak. My mother put her arm round my neck, and leant her cheek against mine, while the doctor examined her. He said but little. Once when he told her to take a long breath, and that in doing so she cried out with pain and coughed, I heard him say, "Pleurisy—congestion," words which I did not then understand.

My mother spat blood, and was quite exhausted by the cough. For an instant I imagined she had stopped breathing. I held my breath, and fancied I did not feel her move upon my bosom. I thought she was dead. And then I felt her breathe again; and the joy of that moment bewildered me.

Some time may have gone by before the doctor's voice recalled me to my senses. I looked up and saw Aunt Jane standing beside me wrapped in her dressing-gown, and I heard the doctor say, "There is no time to lose!" These words awakened me, and gave me power to move and act.

Aunt Jane wanted to wrest the plaster Dr Daly had given me from my hand. The doctor interfered. He and my aunt had an altercation over the bed. My mother looked at me and actually smiled. "Poor Jane!" said she—"poor Jane!"

Dr Daly begged my aunt to leave the room, but she refused. While they were thus wrangling, the seven-o'clock bell happened to ring, so I put down the plaster and whispered to my aunt that she would be

too late to read the Commentary. I thus prevailed upon her to go away and finish dressing.

I was rejoicing that she had gone, when I heard her come back again. However, it was merely to say, "Sophia, mark my words—you have an indigestion, and a chill on your liver, and your lungs and your heart are as well as mine. Plasters and blisters are poisonous for you ; and if you take my advice, you will not mind Dr Daly, for he would bleed you if he dared !" She was gone before the doctor could reply.

The remedies soon gave relief. When Dr Daly was leaving, my mother told him she felt better. "It is a mere cold, doctor," she said. He only answered that he would return about two o'clock. "And, Mrs Thursley, obey my orders, and not Mrs Sherbrook's."

The doctor asked me to take him to Aunt Jane, as he must speak to her before he left. I told him where her room was, but he whispered to me, "Come yourself." So I went with him, and was just entering my aunt's room when I thought I heard my mother call, and ran back to her ; and then she delayed me to ask some question about the blister, and then the speaking made her cough, and that again delayed me.

Some ten minutes must have passed before I joined Dr Daly and Aunt Jane.

I opened the door unnoticed, and stood still on the threshold, for the words I heard echoed like a death-knell in my heart. It was as if I had caught the first sound of the passing bell. The doctor was saying, "I tell you, Mrs Sherbrook, this has been neglected

too long. There is great weakness of the heart, and I doubt if she can pull through. The system must be kept up, for there is not strength to rally. She may not last twelve hours. Why won't you listen to me? Why won't you believe me, Mrs Sherbrook?" And the doctor brought down his hand upon the table with a bang which made Aunt Jane start. "Twelve hours! Do you hear? Twelve! What am I saying? She may be dead in six! Dead! dead, Mrs Sherbrook! and then what can you do for her?"

Dr Daly and my aunt were standing; a small writing-table separated them. The doctor had lost his self-command, as if Aunt Jane had provoked him beyond bearing. My aunt was visibly agitated.

"Dead!" repeated the doctor; "and when she is dead, you will believe she is dying, and ask me to cure her."

"I never will ask you for stimulants and violent remedies! Never, Dr Daly—never! for I don't approve of them."

Aunt Jane hesitated, as if she had lost her head; and then, as if she spoke by rote, she said, "Nature is the restorer of nature."

"Nature the restorer of nature!" retorted the doctor, with a sneer. "Very fine—very fine indeed! Nature should be what she won't be; and, Mrs Sherbrook, the dead should live again and come back and forgive us when we have helped to kill them. They should do so, but they won't! It is we who will come back to our senses, and see and know, and live, never

to forgive ourselves. But the dead won't live because we say they ought to live!"

"The dead!" said I, walking forward—"the dead!"

My voice silenced the doctor, and startled both him and Aunt Jane.

"Sophy," exclaimed my aunt, "come here! I can argue no more. He takes away my breath. Tell him your mother has only an indigestion, and that she will soon be well again. Tell him she is not dying; tell him, Sophy, for I cannot. He won't hear me."

"Indigestion," muttered the doctor; "is she mad? Pleurisy, congestion of the lungs, aggravated heart-disease!"

"Doctor," said my aunt, resting on the table and looking him full in the face, "she is not in danger of her life."

"She is in danger, hourly danger, of her life," said the doctor.

"She is not! she is not!" cried my aunt, and, overcome with agitation, she burst into a wail of tears.

"Why won't you speak, Sophy?" she sobbed. "He is right! he is right! She is dying! I believe him, I believe him now! Speak to me, Sophy—speak!"

"Yes, Aunt Jane," said I; "believe him. Believe him, dear. It is best to believe the truth."

The old doctor was touched. His anger vanished, and he tried to soothe Aunt Jane. Her cry of sorrow would have moved any one. It moved me only too

deeply. I felt for her; and yet I disliked her for crying. Her tears unnerved me.

"In the midst of life we are in death," said Dr Daly, solemnly. "We should be ready, Mrs Sherbrook, and bear up, and not give way. Be brave; it is your duty to go now to your sister and warn her of her danger."

"I cannot! It would kill me!" sobbed my aunt. "Poor Sophia! and she never cared for prayers! Send for Catherine! send for Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart! She will tell Sophia; I know she will. The words would choke me! I could not speak—I could not! Poor Sophia! we never agreed; but you don't know, Dr Daly, how I loved her long ago, before Sophy grew up. Send for Catherine, and don't ask me to tell Sophia she is dying!"

"Catherine Stewart! that hard woman!" I exclaimed, with a cry of horror. "Never! never! I will go to my mother myself. I am her child; and as I love her, I will tell her she is dying. I will have the heart to tell her! No stranger shall do this thing. No hard, unsympathetic woman. Doctor, I implore you, I implore you, keep that woman from this house! You see I do not shrink. I know that I can tell her. I have no feeling now."

"Go, Sophy—go!" cried out my aunt, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Let her go, doctor, for she will go if she likes. Sophy always will do what she likes. Sophy's feelings are not like mine. She was not even sorry, doctor, when her uncle went away yesterday

and I was so lonely! Poor dear Edward! But Sophy does not feel like me; Catherine would feel more. Oh, Dr Daly, Sophy's mother is dying, and she does not even cry!"

My aunt burst into a fresh passion of tears: her grief shook my soul and took away my strength. I hated her; and then my heart smote me. "Comfort her, doctor," I said; "stay and comfort her." But Dr Daly told me he must take leave for the present, and go to a cottage ten miles off, at the other side of Harefield, to see a poor woman whose baby was born last night. "Born that it may die," said I, bitterly.

"I must go, Mrs Sherbrook," said the doctor; "and remember, you have promised me."

My aunt answered with a loud sob, "You know I disapprove of it, Dr Daly; but I will tell Snipkins."

Oh, had I but asked what it was they meant, instead of taking it for granted they alluded to fires and bandages and blisters!

The old doctor was very kind to me, and led me from Aunt Jane's room. I happened to fall, and he lifted me up tenderly, like a father. "My dear young friend," said he, "God bless you and give you strength!" There was a tear in his eye, so I turned away from him and left him brusquely.

The man condemned to death will walk bravely till he puts his foot upon the first step of the scaffold, and then the heart of a strong man will faint because the time has come: there is no reprieve; the hour is no more coming—it has come.

My courage failed me, and I drew back my hand when it touched the door. I shrank like a coward from entering the sick-room. My heart beat so loud and high that I did not hear my mother breathe. Suddenly I remembered, and missed the sound which I had made the doctor stop and listen to. Coward that I am, thought I, have I waited till it is too late?

There is a courage which springs from desperate fear, and stills the panic of our soul, and gives us power to act. I walked quickly into the room, and stood beside the bed. I found my mother breathed, and loudly. It was the agitation and beating of my own heart which had deafened me.

My mother opened her eyes and saw me. "The cough is not so hard," said she, in a strange hoarse voice; "I am better, Sophy, only feverish still." She clasped my hand in her hot one. Speaking brought on the cough, yet she whispered to me, "Dear child, I shall soon, very soon, be well," and she smiled.

I stood silent, like a murderer come to kill and shaken in his purpose. You might give, without a pang, a death-blow to the sleeping or insensible; but it is hard to stab the lively hopeful heart that does not think of death.

I smoothed back the white locks which had fallen on my mother's forehead; my hand lingered on her brow, for by my touch I felt that she was living, and death seemed farther away.

"I shall soon be well," my mother whispered; "who could be ill if that fine sky lasts?"

She looked towards the window, and my eyes followed hers. The morning mist had risen in long thin clouds, like angels' wings, from earth to heaven. I tried to master my trembling voice and speak: "This is indeed a lovely morning," I said, "to be born of such a wretched night. When first I went out, the ground was soaked with rain; but I saw the blue mists rising upwards; and see now, what beautiful clouds they have become! My love," I whispered, bending low over the bed, "are not these clouds risen from the dank earth, like our own souls when they will leave the sorrows of this life and take flight to heaven with angels' wings? My love, my only love and joy, don't think of the strong affection which binds us together with a chain like slaves, but look up at the sky and its soft clouds, and think how beautiful the angels will be in heaven."

I felt my poor mother's hand tremble violently. "Sophy, what do you mean? You cannot mean . . ." A fit of coughing interrupted her; she sank upon my arm. When her voice returned, she whispered, "What are the angels to me? I don't know them; I don't love them; but I love you, my child. Oh, my God! leave me, leave me! I cannot go." She pressed my hand with all the strength of fever. A burning tear, wrung from me by the sight of her anguish, fell from my eye upon her cheek, and I said the cruel

words I had steeled my heart to say—"You are dying. The doctor says that you are dying."

For a moment she lay motionless. I thought she had fainted; and then her lips moved, and starting up, she cried in a hoarse and piercing tone, "Pray for me, Sophy—pray!"

I felt I knew not how to pray, though I could say the Lord's Prayer, and prayed every morning and evening in a sort of way. Till now religion had been a light matter with me. At times the Sherbrooks had even made it a ridiculous and tiresome piece of "sound doctrine." God was not a near reality to me, but rather a vague idea which my mind perceived but did not understand. A heavenly Father? Yes; that is a kinsman living far away whose power and glory I believed in, but whom I did not know. I was silent.

My mother cried out again, "Pray for me, Sophy—pray!"

I fell upon my knees by the bedside, crying aloud that in this hour of agony I knew not how to pray: "I can only cry to Thee for help, O God! This dying woman craves for help to die, for I must stay behind, and she must die, and she cannot die alone! Come near, and be with her. She cannot die alone! Pass by, my God," I prayed, "and have pity, have pity, and behold what a passion of powerful, living feeling there is in this poor woman's soul. No deadness there, no decay to dull the pang of separation! She feels all the wrench and pain of parting, so assuage,

assuage the agony of love she bears me, for the bitterness of death lies there ! O God ! still Thou the anguish of this living, unchanged soul wrenched from its earthly ties ! O Comforter ! O Saviour ! ” I cried, “ draw near in this hour of death ! The pain is too great to bear alone. My God ! my God ! she cannot, oh, she cannot die alone ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN the first shock of parting was over, my mother grew much weaker. She fell into a long, deep sleep. I was glad in my ignorance, thinking sleep must be good for her.

Aunt Jane had recovered her tears and fright, and was most hopeful. She thought "Sophia" going on "very nicely;" in fact, she seemed to consider her nearly well. She kept incessantly mumbling something about Dr Daly. "He is always mistaken—always! She never wanted it. I will tell him she slept all the time; and I am sure he never thought she would sleep like this, for he is always mistaken; and he killed that poor old woman by giving stimulants; and I told him he was killing her, and really . . ." &c., &c., &c., &c., &c., &c. I did not listen. Her running rivulet of whispering speech did not disturb my mother's sleep; and so intently did I watch by the bedside, fearing terribly, yet almost hoping, that I forgot Aunt Jane's presence.

Dr Daly came again at two. His first words were, "Asleep? Why have you let her sleep like that?"

How long has this stupor lasted? Has she got the brandy regularly every quarter of an hour, as I ordered? Mrs Sherbrook," he said angrily, turning to Aunt Jane—"Mrs Sherbrook, have my orders been disobeyed?"

"Dr Daly, you know I disapprove of stimulants, for they are poison to——"

"Mrs Sherbrook, you cannot have forgotten your promise?"

"Indeed I did tell Snipkins to send for some brandy, and perhaps she has had to send to Votlingham, though I told her to send to the dispensary, as you said you had one bottle left; for I am sure Edward has no brandy—and if he had, it would be in the inner cellar, and he has taken all his keys with him; and as Edward has not come home, I should have to send to Votlingham for a man to pick the lock; and even if he opened the outer cellar, no locksmith could open the inner one, because Edward says there is an iron bar and a peculiar sort of padlock, which no one understands but himself; and even if it was open, I know there is no brandy there; and George thinks Edward keeps his port-wine somewhere else; but, you see, Edward never will tell me, because he knows I disapprove of alcohol in every form; and indeed, Dr Daly, I think good, sound, healthy sleep is much better for Sophia than brandy."

The doctor did not answer Aunt Jane. He appeared not to hear her. He stood speechless by the bedside,

and held my mother's hand, feeling her pulse. His usually ruddy face was livid with rage. Terror seized me.

"Doctor," I said, in a low voice, "if this brandy has not come, if you cannot awake her from this stupor, there is no hope?"

"It must have come—it must!" he said, loudly.

"Oh why was I not told before? Why was I not told instead of Snipkins?"

I found Aunt Jane's maid in her mistress's room standing before the "mourning wardrobe." She held a black stuff-gown and a roll of crape in her hand. The silk dress Aunt Jane had got when the widow of her first cousin once removed had died, lay stretched upon the sofa. I knew at a glance what the woman was doing, and I sickened with disgust. Snipkins smiled at me in an imbecile kind of way, unlike her usual stern self.

"Miss Sophy," said she, "I'm just ha-looking hover Mrs Sherbrook's black things. She'll want 'em h afore long. I'm ha-thinking she'll be for throwing away that 'ere black stuff; and there's 'Arriet ha-sitting hidle with 'er 'ands ha-doing nothing, and Satan ha-running loose in this 'ere world seeking whom he may devour! and hit disgusts me to see 'er! With this bit of hextra crape, you'll see hif hi won't make 'Arriet do hup that hold skirt deep and decent, and fit for my hown mourning when your poor dear mar dies. Look, Miss Sophy, the stuff his not that bad hafter hall."

I caught the dress which Snipkins offered me, and threw it on the floor and trampled it under foot.

"Hold your offending tongue, unnatural wretch!" I cried; "give me the brandy this instant—without another word! Do you hear?"

"Sperits! no, miss—no!" whimpered Snipkins; and then she exclaimed, with some of her usual impudence, "'Ow dare you come haccusing hof me? Mrs Sherbrook won't believe you, Miss Thursley! She knows, good lady, has 'ow you're ha-walking hon the broad road which leads to heverlasting perdition—heverlasting perdition," she repeated, and began to cry. "I might 'ave taken one glass of hale with that 'ere black gentleman, which I'm not haccustomed to."

I was struck dumb, for the idea crossed my mind that Snipkins was not quite sober. I had never seen a tipsy woman before. To be drunk at such an hour, and with death in the very house! I loathed the odious creature. I shrank from her, as from a reptile, with horror!

Snipkins wiped her eyes. "Not ha drop ho sperits would I touch," said she—"not ha drop! though Mrs Sherbrook her own self told me to send to the dispensary for a bottle hof brandy: 'Halthough,' said she, 'Snipkins, I hentirely disapprove of hit;,' and hi said, 'Hand so do hi, ma'm.'"

I asked breathlessly, "Did you send? Did you obey her orders?" My voice frightened Snipkins into a fresh apology.

"I never touches ha drop, Miss Sophia—never!"

"Did you or did you not obey Mrs Sherbrook's orders? Answer me—this moment!"

"Miss Sophia, hi'll complain you to your haunt. Hi gives my horders to 'Arriet, and not to you." And the degraded being came close up to me and whispered confidentially, "P'raps 'Arriet 'as bin and taken 'alf a glass too much."

She made an effort to catch me by the arm; but I shook off the hateful wretch, and ran from the room and along the passage. I looked back in terror, to see if Snipkins followed me. I saw her standing in the doorway of my aunt's room, holding up the black dress by the two sleeves and gibbering like a fool—like Death gone mad; merrily, with imbecile joy, flaunting the weeds of woe.

Harriet declared her aunt had given her no message. I ran to the front door and found Dr Daly's gig, but no one in it. I searched for George; he was not to be found. The servants said he had gone for his mid-day walk. Thomas was in Votlingham. Bill had never driven a horse in his life. At last a stable-boy was found, and started in the doctor's gig.

There was not even a bottle of sal-volatile in the house. When I came into the sick-room empty-handed, the old doctor could not contain his anger. He bitterly upbraided my aunt for not seeing the messenger herself, for trusting to the memory of her maid and for allowing all these long hours of fatal delay.

My mother was sleeping heavily still.

"It is weakness of the heart," said the doctor, "which makes her sleep like that. She is sinking—sinking fast. I tell you, Mrs Sherbrook, as I told you before this day, it is you who will have killed your sister."

For the moment Aunt Jane was cowed. She did not speak; she put up her hands, as if she pleaded for mercy. The doctor stood in front of her, and said in a clear, hard voice, which seemed to echo in the stillness of the room—

"You have lost the only hope. It is even now too late."

.
A man who in a distant prison-cell hears the murdering rabble come nearer and nearer, entering each cell and slaughtering as they come, and yet thinks there is a door which, could he but unlock, would let him out into the free world; and thinks, too, there is a friend who hears him call and knock, and is coming to his rescue, but slowly, as if there were time enough,—a man in such a strait as this has lived an age in sixty seconds! There is a lifetime in a minute! Look at your watch, and the hands will not seem to move.

The doctor paced up and down the sick-room, counting each minute, each second in each minute! I knelt beside the bed and held my mother's hand, watching for fear her pulse might stop. Every now and then I started, thinking I heard a sound, and that an hour had wellnigh passed away. I would ask the doctor

how long we had waited, and find five minutes had scarce gone by.

My mother still slept on—or rather, she lay in a dreamy, half-conscious state, coughing feebly from time to time. We tried in vain to wake her up: she sighed, and made a sign as if the sunlight blinded her, then drowsily sank her head upon my breast.

Dr Daly paced the room once more. I listened to every sound, but time would not pass away. My heart sank within me. I thought every breath my mother took would be her last.

The doctor stopped his walk, and stood still beside the bed. He pulled back the curtains he had closed. A change came over my mother's face. I saw it come, and a bitter cry escaped my lips—the cry of hope gone by for ever!

It may have been soon or it may have been long afterwards that I heard, that we all heard, the sound of approaching wheels. "Too late," repeated the doctor; "of no use now."

Dr Daly dropped the stimulant down my mother's throat. She could hardly swallow, but revived a little, opened her eyes, touched the glass, and feebly said "Jane" to my aunt.

"It was Dr Daly who sent for it," exclaimed Aunt Jane, as if she were excusing herself for having brandy in the house—strange woman that she is!

"Sophy," murmured my mother, "come soon . . . soon," and she seemed to faint away. The doctor tried

to renew the dose. She could not swallow. He tried again, and then again, and then again; but all in vain. The faint continued. We raised her in bed—we chafed her hands; but it was a sleep from which we could not awaken her.

“She is dead,” said the doctor—“she is dead!”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN entranced by the power of a nightmare, sobs and piercing cries of woe may strike our ear, and we will feel that we cannot move to give help or comfort. When we awake, can we say if we were dreaming, or if in truth we heard the cry of living sorrow?

When my mother's last breath had fled, I think I heard a piercing cry, and saw my annt throw herself upon the bed, and heard her call out loudly, "Sophia, speak to me! speak to me! You are not dead!" And then it seems to me some of the servants—I cannot say which of them—came into the room, and that Annt Jane was carried out by Dr Daly and quite a crowd of people. Can I say now if this were so, or if I dreamed?

Unless I dreamt it all, I think I was left alone, still seated on the bed, with my arm around my mother still supporting her, and with her head still resting on my breast. Did I think she was sleeping, or did I know she lay dead?

It seems to me I thought she breathed, and that I

saw her move, and laid her down upon the pillow, and took the glass which the doctor had left lying on the bed and held it to her lips, and thought she breathed upon it, and then . . . that I looked again, and knew it was my own breath which dulled the glass. I dreamt (it must have been a dream, or I could not now ~~have been~~ living)—I dreamt that I felt the agony of conceived joy turned into dead despair, and that I sank upon my knees benumbed, without a prayer and without a hope left in my soul.

Hours may have passed, or only slowly dying minutes, when I raised my head and thought Uncle Sherbrook stood beside me—not a hard, not a forbidding, but a softened man. I thought he spoke in a kind, sad voice—in a voice I had never heard before—and that he lifted me up, and supported me with his strong arm; and I thought that I leant my head on his shoulder, and felt glad in my weakness I had found strength to rest upon. “It is not good for you to be here,” I heard him say. I thought he bore me tenderly, and took me away from the chamber of death, and led me into another room, but not into Aunt Jane’s. All this time I cannot tell if I lay dreaming with open eyes, or if I closed them when night came on, and slept till the sun had risen some hours next day.

But I do remember clearly, vividly, the first return to conscious sorrow—the gathering together of my senses, like the cloud of madness gathering in my brain. Madness? In madness there is an hour of

sorrow, then one of joy: it is a half-conscious, half-believing state; but this was worse. I awoke, I shook off the stupor of a dream, and I believed, with all the strength and power of life—I believed that what I loved most on earth lay dead. Dead! Oh what an awful word is that when we believe in its reality! Dead! silent, cold, and deaf! If the dead could only come back to us for one short hour, that we might know they had heard our first most bitter cry of sorrow, and that their love and pity had not turned to indifference! It rends our heart when the love of the living turns suddenly cold towards us; but we have a hope, and think in time it will grow warm again—or else we scorn it from us with anger, and our passion turns it into hatred, and hatred is a warm and living thing! It stirs us up to fight with it, to repay its hate with hate; but it does not chill, and paralyse, and make impotent slaves of us like cold indifference. Our anger cannot fight against the apathy of death. Our passions rise in vain. It is this sense of utter weakness which subdues us, and makes obedient children of us in our sorrow. Awe-struck and hopeless, we become calm—conquered by the silent apathy of death.

I arose from the bed on which I found myself lying. I realised where I was, and knew that my mother lay dead in the house. I felt a longing to see her face once more. I yearned to see those features I loved so well, for it seemed a lifetime since I had beheld them. I tried to recall that face and

look to my mind, and I found with dismay that I could not. My memory was blurred.

I went out into the silent passage,—it was silent as the grave. But I could not enter the room of the dead, for the door was locked ; so I turned back and crossed the lobby, and went into my aunt's room.

Aunt Jane lay half dressed upon the sofa. She screamed when she saw me, and Snipkins screamed too. I said—

“Have you the key of my mother's room? I must go in there and see her.”

“She thinks her poor dear mother is alive!” screamed my aunt. “Sophy, Sophy, she is dead! Don't you know she is dead? I see you don't believe it, or you would not wear a blue band round your waist, though you have queer ideas of mourning. Poor dear Sophia, she is dead! and I know Dr Daly thinks I killed her, and you will never forgive me, Sophy!”

With a great effort I remembered clearly the events of yesterday. I had taken my aunt's hand, but I let it fall and recoiled from its touch. She murdered my mother with her silly whims and follies, thought I. Aunt Jane saw that I held back, and she burst into a bitter cry, and sobbed like a child. Her grief touched me. Subdued and hopeless, I had lost the power to hate. My aunt's sorrow moved me to pity, and taking her outstretched hand, I said—

“It is too late; she is dead, and cannot come back to me now. I forgive you. It is too late!”

Aunt Jane clasped me in her arms, and sobbed over

me, and blessed me. I asked a second time for the key of my mother's room.

"Why do you lock the door?" said I, "when you know I must wish to go in and gaze upon her face, for fear I should forget her."

"Forget your own poor mother!" exclaimed my aunt, starting away from me in horror; "unnatural child! you do not feel like me! I never shall forget poor dear Sophia!"

"I cannot see her now," I said, half closing my eyes, and speaking aloud to myself. "I have forgotten her—forgotten her before the first full day of death is past!"

"Forgotten her! Oh, Sophy, you have no feeling!" And Aunt Jane gave way to an outburst of tears, mingled with exclamations of astonishment and horror and sorrow.

"Yes," I repeated; "I have forgotten her."

A sudden dread took hold of me. What did I know of death? A change might have come over the features I loved; they might be strange to me, and not recall the face I longed to see again.

"I can wait no more, for time is passing," I cried, in an agony of impatience. "Unlock that door, or I will break it open. I must see her once again."

Snipkins uttered a loud scream. "Lor, miss!" she cried, "you should not go ha-gazing hon the corpse!"

Corpse! I clung to a chair for support. My heart fainted within me at the loathsome word, which seemed to turn the living one of yesterday into the

hideous carrion of to-day—into corruption with a name apart! Corpse! inhuman word!—as if one short night were long enough to kill my deep affection, and make me shun what I most loved!

Uncle Sherbrook came in from the dressing-room and asked who had screamed.

“It was poor Snipkins, Edward,” sobbed my aunt; “she is quite upset by hearing Sophy say she must have the key, and will go in to poor dear Sophia’s room. Snipkins is shocked, for Sophy says she has forgotten her poor mother. She says dreadful things, and does not cry. Oh, Edward, Sophy is most unfeeling!”

“Hush, Jane!” replied my uncle, severely.

“Sophy,” he said to me gently, putting his arm round me and supporting me as he had done yesterday, “you wish to see the dead once more. When my own father died I had that same desire. Your mother is dead—I know you have not forgotten it; but come with me and see, and you will believe.”

As we left the room, I remember hearing Snipkins loudly exclaim, “The master’s not ’imself like!”

They had laid my poor mother low on the bed, straightly and stiffly; her hands were crossed upon her breast. When first I saw the stiff, dead body, my blood ran cold; but when I came near, I stood enraptured, filled with a kind of awful joy. There was a look of heaven in that still, pale face—a strange, unearthly look, as if the veiled eyes had seen the living God, and could not gaze again on earthly sights. There was a holy smile upon the parted lips,

and peace, unutterable peace, upon the brow ; no look of pain—no weird, distorting frown.

I gazed and gazed until that look was engraved upon my heart for ever. I bent and kissed the cold, dead lips—the speechless lips ! And then I took a long, a last long look, and turned away. “Come ; it is over,” I said. “She is silent,—she is dead. I have seen her face, and now I know her spirit is with God.”

Uncle Sherbrook walked hastily from the darkened room of death. It was I who locked the door, for he forgot to do so. I gave him the key and went into the room where I had lain the night before. My uncle followed me a few paces, and then stopped. I looked at him, and saw his face quivered. I thought he was going to speak to me, but he went away and left me alone.

I found the blinds pulled down and the curtains drawn. The darkness oppressed me ; so I let in the sunlight, and opened the window that I might breathe the air and look out upon the clouds and trees. I heard a bird singing as it rose skywards—a song of joyful rapture. A holy calm came over me—a feeling of peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE morning of the funeral came at last. They tell me my mother was buried the day week after she died. I had lost all knowledge of time; each hour in that long week had seemed a day. I could not sleep. When the sun rose, I felt in a dull sort of way the dreaded day had come. When our spirit has been wrenched by too much sorrow, our power of feeling dies. During those long inorning-hours, I remember nothing but a sense of endless weariness, until a sound of muffled voices awakened in my mind an idea of what was passing near me. I got up from the sofa on which I had thrown myself, without undressing, the night before. I started, for I thought a woman in deep mourning stood by the window; and then I perceived it was my own reflection in the long glass—the reflection of a ghost in awful black. I looked down at my dress, and saw that I was clothed in the deepest mourning. Strange to say, I felt no surprise. I am dressed for the funeral, thought I; they are moving the coffin—that is the noise I hear.

I heard the shuffling of feet in the passage, and

then the dull thud of something striking against the door. It is the coffin, I thought; they are taking it away. I must follow it to the grave.

I opened the door, and saw they were carrying the pall-covered coffin across the lobby. Four men in black, with black scarves and weepers, and with huge black fan-topped staves in their hands, stood at the head of the staircase. I shuddered, for they were hideous to behold. I went out and followed the coffin slowly down-stairs. The hall was full of people. I do not know who they all were. I have a kind of notion that some one spoke to me, and that I looked at him, and did not know him; that he spoke to me again, and that I thought he was my cousin, and said to him, "Denis, she is dead. You are too late."

But I do recall to mind that Uncle Sherbrook came up to me and drew me inside the drawing-room, and shut the door, and said sternly, "Sophy, you have no bonnet, and your hair is lying loose. You must not go to the funeral. You have gone through too much already." I remember these words, because I can never forget the great effort it was to me to grasp their meaning. My uncle bade me stay where I was. I obeyed him like a child.

I saw the black be-plumed hearse and the troop of hired mourners move slowly down the avenue, followed by a train of carriages. The hideous hearse went farther and farther from me, and I gazed at it unmoved, forgetting what it was I looked upon. Suddenly I seemed to understand it all. "They have

taken her away from me!" I cried; "for ever!—for ever!

I remember nothing more that day.

Next morning (I suppose it was next morning) the ringing of a bell aroused me from a wearisome dream—a dream which left no impression on the mind—a play without a plot. The bell sounded in my ear like a voice calling on me to awake and come back to the uneventful life, without great joy and without sorrow, which I seemed to have forgotten. The bell startled me, and I noticed for the first time that no bells were rung while my mother lay dead in the house.

When the prayer-bell rang, I went down-stairs and listened to the servants reading a genealogy from the Old Testament, and to Aunt Jane's hymn, and to the Commentary. I longed for comfort, but there was none in this cold worship of what almost seemed to me an unreal God. I listened unmoved; till Uncle Sherbrook, having given the final blessing, rose while we were still kneeling, and said, "'I am the resurrection, and the life,' saith the Lord: 'he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.' In great affliction . . ." began my uncle. His voice faltered. "You may go!" he said to the staring servants. They were too much astonished to obey. "Go! Do you hear? You may go!" cried my uncle, seemingly in a passion.

"Oh, Edward! you have frightened poor Snipkins!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, when the servants left the room.

She made matters worse by wondering what could make Edward so violent, "when we are all so nervous!" and she shed tears. My aunt did not perceive Uncle Sherbrook was not angry, only overcome by sudden feeling. His emotion scandalised her, but it touched me: it moved me so that the sight of the empty place at table, now that we had all met again, made my heart die within me and dazed my mind. I repeated half aloud, "Though she were dead, yet shall she live. Live?—though she were dead? Who said those words?" I asked, distraught.

Aunt Jane gave a scream of horror. "Wicked girl! She does not know her Bible!" And then such a torrent of disconnected complaints and puzzling sentences poured forth, that I was bewildered, and felt I must escape or lose my mind. I opened the window and went out, and took the path I had trodden that last time, with my dear mother leaning on my arm.

Aunt Jane was going to follow me, but I heard Uncle Sherbrook call her back.

At first the cool air revived me, and I thought I would walk through the glen, and on, on, ever so far, out of sight of the dismal house, away from the sound of bewildering voices—beyond passion and sorrow, into solitude and peace. My strength failed me. I was forced to stop and rest in the beech-tree by the garden-gate. I leant back amongst the branches, for I was faint. The spot recalled past memories too vividly. I saw my mother's pale face, I heard her cough, and I

could not persuade myself that I did not really see her there resting by my side.

I was awakened from the sort of trance into which I had fallen by a footstep on the gravelled path. I looked up. It was Uncle Sherbrook, who walked hurriedly towards me. I sprang to my feet, and would have run away if I could, but I was too weak. I felt some of my old dread of him again. I shrank from him; "for he is excited," I thought, "and angry with me for leaving the breakfast-table. I have lost my nerve. A harsh word will kill me."

Uncle Sherbrook stood beside me. He broke a small branch from the beech-tree, saying, as if much annoyed, "They do not thin those lower branches as they ought;" and he went some little distance off and threw the bough among the bushes. He came back.

"Sophy," he said sternly, almost in an angry voice, "you must not grieve like this any longer. Do you hear?"

I gave no answer.

"Do you hear me, Sophy?" he repeated, still more loudly; and then, to my surprise, he bent down and kissed my forehead. He had never kissed me in his life before.

"Sophy," he said, and his voice actually trembled,—"Sophy, I have no child but you, so I will be your father now, and you shall be my child. God bless you!" He left me abruptly, for his voice had failed him.

Stupefied, I looked after him, and did not speak.

"I will be your father now." The kind words rang in my ear: they were too much for me, like sudden sunshine blinding a prisoner in his darkness.

Kindness and sympathy may be set in some harsh key; yet they are a sort of music like none other, for they melt the hardened heart. Mine was a hard heart, and the tears that were wrung from it were bitter, like the waters which of old flowed from the rock.

I wept the gladness of my youth away.

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